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उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED

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No. 5

Divine Wisdom

DETAILS OF THE PATH OF DEVOTION

(Sage Kapila to his mother Devahūti)

मद्गुणश्रुतिमात्रेण मयि सर्वगुहाशये।
मनोगतिरविच्छिन्ना यथा गङ्गाम्भसोऽम्बुधौ॥
लक्षणं भक्तियोगस्य निर्गुणस्य ह्यदाहतम्।
अहैतुक्यव्यवहिता या भक्तिः पुरुषोत्तमे॥

want is the opportunity to render loving service to Me.

स एव भक्तियोगाख्य आत्यन्तिक उदाहतः।
येनातिव्रज्य त्रिगुणं मद्भावायोपपद्यते॥

When, by the mere hearing of My excellences, the mind streams forth, like the waters of the Ganges into the sea, unmotivated, unrestricted, and one-pointed towards Me, the Purushottama and the Presence in the hearts of all, that kind of love is called Bhakti that transcends the Gunas.

Such is the greatness and glory of this supreme state of Bhakti, that by means of it the Jiva overcomes the hold of the three Gunas of Prakriti and becomes fit for My Divine State.

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 3.29.11-14

सालोक्यसार्ष्टिसामीप्यसारूप्यैकत्वमप्युत।
दीयमानं न गृह्णन्ति विना मत्सेवनं जनाः॥

Such devotees do not accept, even when offered, any of the five forms of liberation (Moksha)—Sālokya (living in My sphere), Sārṣṭi (having my powers), Sāmīpya (living close to Me), Sārūpya (having a form similar to Mine), and Sāyujya (being one with Me). The only thing they

कल्याणी बत गाथेयं लौकिकी प्रतिबाति मे।
एति जीवन्तमानन्दो नरं वर्षशतादपि॥

Verily, the auspicious saying of the people appears to me to be true that, though after a hundred years, joy comes to a man if he but lives.

—Vidyasagara Vidyavachaspati Prof. R.P.S. Sastri, *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, Sundara Kāṇḍa*, p. 295, told by Sita to Hanuman; *Yuddha Kāṇḍa*, p. 415, told by Bharata to Hanuman.

Mother's Grace

In a letter to the Hale Sisters dated 8 September 1894 Swami Vivekananda writes: 'Glory unto Jagadamba (Mother of the Universe)! I have gained beyond expectations. The prophet has been honoured and with a *vengeance*. I am weeping like a child at His mercy—He never leaves His servant, sisters.... O sisters! What a rogue am I that in the face of such mercies sometimes the faith totters—seeing every moment that I am in His hands. Still the mind sometimes gets despondent. Sister, there is a God—a Father—a *Mother* who never leaves His Children, never, never, never. Put uncanny theories aside and becoming children take refuge in Him.' This was in response to the much-awaited news about the Calcutta Meeting of 5 September 1894 which placed on record 'its grateful appreciation of the great services rendered to the cause of Hinduism by Swami Vivekananda at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago, and of his subsequent work in America.'

There is a Power that guides the destinies of men and women whether they know it or not. That Power, *Śakti* is worshipped variously; Sri Ramakrishna worshipped Her as Kali. He would say that Brahman and Sakti are identical. When engaged in the acts of creation, preservation and destruction it is called Kali. All of us are functioning in the domain of Sakti and it is therefore necessary to propitiate Sakti, the power of Brahman. Unless She is pleased, there is no way for a human being to cross the ocean of *saṁsāra* (cycle of repeated births and deaths). She is the cause of bondage, and She it is who, when pleased, takes one beyond Maya.

The three-fold functions of creation, preservation and destruction belong to

Sakti. She, in her association with Brahman, projects this world of multifarious shapes and colours, of names and forms. She is the one who preserves the world rhythm and She it is who withdraws it at the end of a cycle of existence. It is reasonable that one preserve what one creates, but if one should destroy it then what need is there to create or preserve? Such a doubt may arise in human minds. That it is the play of the divine may not be satisfying, steeped in ignorance as we are. We think, what is play to the Mother is death to us! However, if we interpret the words preservation and destruction to mean, preservation of the virtue (*dharma*) of the virtuous and the destruction of the wickedness (*adharma*) of the wicked, then it may be acceptable to many. We see that with this two-fold end in view, Incarnations of God come into our midst from time to time. As stated in that oft-quoted verse of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, 'Whenever, O descendent of Bharata, righteousness declines and unrighteousness prevails, I manifest Myself. For the *protection of the righteous* and the *destruction of the wicked*, and for the *establishment of religion*, I come into being from age to age.'¹ A similar idea is expressed in a not-so-oft-quoted *Śloka* of the *Śrī Śrī Chāṇḍī*: 'Thus whenever trouble arises due to the advent of the demons, I shall incarnate and destroy the foes.'² In a few verses preceding the above-quoted one, the Divine Mother also says that Her act of destruction of the wicked is for the protection of virtuous people. From a study of the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* it will be seen that it is with such a purpose, namely, to put an end to the

1. Chapter 4, *Ślokas* 7-8.

2. Chapter 11, *Ślokas*, 54-5.

wicked deeds of Ravana, that Sri Rama incarnated with his divine consort Sri Sita. But even Ravana was granted liberation, not to speak of the many virtuous persons who met Sri Rama and assisted him in various ways in the fulfilment of his mission on earth. All other incarnations are also known to have descended on earth as human beings only to show to erring man the way to divinity and to enthuse him to follow the path in the mould prepared by him. The methods adopted by them to eliminate wickedness from and instil virtue in the heart of man vary from age to age. But in each Incarnation we get plenty of scope to contemplate the play of the divine as a human and thus, enriched with devotion, become enabled to reach the highest goal of human life.

In the present age, the divine incarnated itself in the form of Sri Ramakrishna and his divine consort Sri Sarada Devi. They brought with them a band of disciples headed by Swami Vivekananda with the sole purpose of removing the misery of mankind. Misery born of ignorance can be removed only by knowledge of one's divine nature. This divine nature of man is hidden from man's view and it is precisely to show the way to its manifestation even in this life that Sri Ramakrishna embodied himself and went through a wide spectrum of religious practices, unique in the spiritual history of the world, with great spiritual longing. The narration and study, with a devout mind, of the spiritual practices undergone by Sri Ramakrishna is a soul-purifying experience.

This movement of the Godhead to reach humanity with Its healing touch in later days took the shape of the twin organization, the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission. We must not therefore fail to remember that these two organizations derive inspiration from the life and teachings of the Holy Trio and are therefore spiritual in nature and not secular. Secular organizations too have done some good in the past. They try to reach certain temporal

goals through certain methods which methods are changed as time goes by so that the goals are better approximated through better methods. In a spiritual organization, on the contrary, the goal is fixed and that is to reach the divine, our Source—to manifest the Divine within. In so doing we have to follow a course of disciplines which varies from age to age since the social conditions and outlook change with passage of time and the methods of one age are not usually as appropriate for another age as are alternate methods which are not in man's capacity to discover by his own efforts. The incarnations present to humanity these new methods especially suited to the age in which they come into our midst. It is possible that human beings may still cling to previously established ways and the Incarnation of God also revalidates, as it were, these previously established paths as well, paths which had proven efficacious in a different age under a different set of circumstances. Again, as stated in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, the Incarnation of God has also to revive these methods since these become ineffective with the passage of time. The fact that these methods of old stand verified in the lives of Incarnations also reinforces the faith of man in the Godhead which promulgated these methods in the past.

Thus in the present age, when we are now at a point in time which occasions the celebration of the centenary of the Ramakrishna Mission, it is for us to remember that Sri Ramakrishna is the plan, the purpose and the sustaining spirit of the organization that bears his name. It is also necessary to meditate on some of the events in the life of the Holy Trio which had a part to play in giving shape to the Ramakrishna Movement as a whole. It is equally necessary to meditate on the special makeup of the minds of the Holy Trio which will prove efficacious in building our own lives and also in participating more effectively in the mission of the divine.

Regarding the advent of an Incarnation of God we seldom get such a vivid picture as we have regarding Sri Ramakrishna's advent. We have a narration in the words of Sri Ramakrishna himself of a vision he had before Narendra came to Dakshineswar that describes his own advent:

One day I saw that, through Samadhi, my mind was going up by a luminous path. Going beyond the gross world studded with the sun, the moon and stars, it entered first of all into the subtle world of ideas. The more it began to ascend to higher and higher strata of that realm, the more did I see beautiful ideal forms of deities existing on both sides of the path. It came gradually to the last extremity of that region. I saw a fence made of light there separating the realm of the divisible from that of the indivisible. Leaping over that fence, the mind entered by degrees the realm of the indivisible. I saw that there was no more any person or thing there having a form. ...the very next moment I saw seven Rishis having bodies consisting of divine Light only, seated there in Samadhi. I felt that, in virtue and knowledge, love and renunciation, they had excelled even the gods and goddesses, not to speak of human beings. Astonished, I was pondering over their greatness when I saw before me that a part of the homogeneous mass of Light of the 'Abode' of the indivisible, devoid of the slightest tinge of difference, became solidified and converted into the form of a divine Child. Coming down to one of those Rishis, and throwing Its soft and delicate arms round his neck It embraced him and, afterwards, calling him with Its ambrosial words sweeter than the music of the Vina (a musical instrument), made great efforts to wake him up from Samadhi. The Rishi woke up at the delicate and loving touch and looked on at that wonderful child with half-shut eyes, free

from winking. Seeing the state of his bright face, full of delight, I thought that the Child was the treasure of his heart—their familiarity was of eternity. The extraordinary divine Child then expressed infinite joy and said to him, 'I am going, you must come with me.' The Rishi said nothing at that request but his loving eyes expressed his hearty assent. Afterwards, looking on the child with loving eyes for some time, he entered again into Samadhi.... Hardly had I seen Narendra for the first time when I knew that he was that Rishi.³

When asked about the Child of the vision, Sri Ramakrishna revealed that he himself had assumed the form of that Child.

The Incarnation also brought with him his divine power to help him in fulfilling his mission. In the Prelude to *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, Swami Gambhirananda writes,

God as associated with His Power, is alone able to set in motion a new cycle of social and spiritual regeneration; else it is impossible to conceive of the Absolute Brahman as involved in any process of evolution. When God incarnates as man, He invokes this Power and then employs Her for the good of men. Divine Power, thus propitiated by the Lord Himself, becomes gracious and suitably rearranges the factors concerned for the advancement of erring and perplexed humanity. Not only this, when God comes down as man, Divine Power also accompanies Him most often as a woman. ...In truth, Divine Power, whether on the spiritual or on the material plane, or as the consort of an Incarnation, helps Him immensely in His mission. Divorced from Power, His divine drama cannot be enacted, nor can it be comprehended by us.'

A perusal of the lives of Sri Ramak-

3. *Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1970), pp. 736-7.

rishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda will reveal that they live beyond their mortal existence and help them who have dedicated themselves to their cause in various ways by guiding them in unseen ways as well as by making themselves visible to mortal eyes. To understand the single power (Mother Kali) that worked through these three different bodies in three different ways and still works, we have to depend on the feelings given vent to by them inadvertently.

One day Sri Sarada Devi had a vision of Mother Kali with her neck turned aside, and questioned by her to reveal the cause of that posture of Hers, Mother Kali replied, 'Because of his (Ramakrishna's) sore throat I too have it.'⁴ And on Sri Ramakrishna's entering Mahasamadhi in 1886, the Holy Mother exclaimed, 'Mother Kali, dear, for what fault of mine have you left me?'⁵

Sri Ramakrishna also many times expressed that the Holy Mother was the Blissful Mother of the universe⁶. On one occasion questioned by the Holy Mother as to how Sri Ramakrishna regarded her, the Master said, 'The same Mother that is in the temple, gave birth to this body and now resides at the Nahabat, and she, again, is now massaging my feet. Truly do I see you as a veritable form of the Blissful Mother.' The Holy Mother too revealed her divine status on many occasions though sometimes she hastily corrected her inadvertent slips. It was once while going from Kamarpukur to Jayrambati that the Holy Mother had to face the ordeal of having to reveal to her nephew Sivaram her identity. The Mother had to say at last, 'People say, I am Kali.' To be doubly sure Sivaram asked, 'Kali? Truly so?' The Mother said, 'Yes.' And once in February 1920, Sivaram wept piteously like a child

with the words, 'Assure me whether you have accepted all my burden, and whether you are Mother Kali Herself.' Moved to see Sivaram's tears, the Mother laid her hands on his head and said solemnly, 'Yes, that's so.'⁷

It is true that during one of the early encounters between Sri Ramakrishna and Narendranath, the Master, based on his vision mentioned earlier, identified his chief disciple to be sage Nara, the incarnation of Narayana, born on earth to remove the miseries of mankind, and the Master had to wait for three or four years before Naren accepted the divine Mother and could be made over to Her. The day Naren accepted the divine Mother, Sri Ramakrishna was filled with joy. Years later when it was only three or four days before the Mahasamadhi of Sri Ramakrishna, he called Naren to him and looking steadfastly at him entered into deep meditation. Thus he transmitted his spiritual power to Naren and told him that by the force of that power he would do great things. Sometime earlier he had given Narendra an experience of highest Samadhi and told him, 'Now then, the Mother has shown you everything. Just as a treasure is locked up in a box, so will this realization you have just had be locked up and the key shall remain with me. You have work to do. When you have finished my work, the treasure box will be unlocked again; and you will know everything then, as you did just now.'

Wrote Swamiji to Mary Hale on 17 June 1900: 'Kali worship is not a necessary step in any religion.... Kali worship is my special *fad*; you never heard me preach it, or read of my preaching it in India. I only preach what is good for universal humanity. If there is any curious method which applies entirely to me, I keep it a secret and there it ends. I must not explain to you what Kali worship is, as I never taught it to anybody. ...Kali

4. *Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1977), p. 135.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 452.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 46, 114, 426, 450.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 432.

worship helps me in my *secular work*.⁸

Sister Nivedita records Swamiji's words relating to his dedication to Mother Kali:

'How I used to hate Kali!' he said, 'and all Her ways! That was the ground of my six years' fight—that I would not accept Her. But I had to accept Her at last. Ramakrishna Paramahansa dedicated me to Her, and now I believe that She guides me in every little thing I do, and does with me what She will! ...the thing that made me do it is a secret that will die with me. I had great misfortunes at that time.... It was an opportunity.... She made a slave of me. Those were the very words—'a slave of you'. And Ramakrishna Paramahansa made me over to Her. ...The future, you say, will call Ramakrishna Paramahansa an Incarnation of Kali? Yes, I think there's no doubt that She worked up the body of Ramakrishna for Her own ends. You see, I cannot but believe that there is somewhere a great Power That thinks of Herself as feminine, and called Kali, and Mother.... And why should it be different from Brahman? It is Brahman. It is the One.'⁹

Thus it was the Divine Mother who acted through the Holy Trio to accomplish Her work—namely to establish religion, to protect the virtue of the virtuous and to remove the wickedness of the wicked. The method adopted is especially suited to the present age. In the highly illuminating words of Swami Gambhirananda,

'Above everything else, the present-day world needs moral progress and spiritual enlightenment. If faith, purity, and devotion can once attain supremacy, the outer world is bound to change. The incarnate Divine Power is therefore, now

engaged in fighting internal enemies. ...So in the present incarnation there is no clanging of weapons or the din of war; but there is an abundance of modesty, humility, purity, goodness, practical love, and spiritual experience.'

This is the Mother's work. This is the proof of Her grace and of Her love for humanity. And we ought to consider ourselves blessed if we are *allowed* to play the least part in this divine mission. In the words of Swamiji, expressive of both hope and caution,

'Whoever will assist in this work of the Divine Mother of the universe, will have Her grace, and whoever will oppose it will not only be "अकारणविकृत-वैरदारुणः—raising a deadly enemy for nothing", but also laying the axe to his own prospects.'¹⁰

Highlighting the role of the twin organization, Kamakhya Nath Mitra observes:

That tremendous spiritual force which, manifested in the previous avatars, revived India age after age whenever a danger was impending, manifested itself once more in Ramakrishna-Vivekananda to raise her from a fall before which all her previous falls shrink into insignificance. The centre of this spiritual force is the Ramakrishna Math, the nursery and training-ground of learned Brahmacharins and Sannyasins of a character bold and intrepid—Brahmacharins and Sannyasins who through the grand organization of the Ramakrishna Mission are foremost in the service of humanity.... The soul of the Mission in its narrower sense is the Math and the soul of the country lies in the educational and philanthropic institutions of the Mission. The future of the country is quite assured as long as the ideals of the Maths and the institutions of the Mission remain unimpaired.¹¹ □

8. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 8, pp. 522–3. [Hereafter *Complete Works*.]

9. *The Master As I Saw Him* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1972), pp. 164–5.

10. *Complete Works*, vol. 6, p. 426.

11. *Prabuddha Bharata*, 1927, p. 13.

Muṇḍaka-Upaniṣad

SWAMI SRIDHARANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

Chapter 2

Sādhana—Removing the Mental Dirt

If all *sādhana*s, which involve material things and the mind, lead only to temporary results (*anitya-vastu*) such as *adrṣṭa*, heaven, etc., then what is the meaning of saying that some *sādhana*s lead also to the *Akṣara*, the undecaying? The Upaniṣads say that we should not get confused about this aspect. The spiritual *sādhana*s performed in our life-time do lead us to the goal of realization of our true nature implied by '*aham brahmāsmi*', '*ayam ātmā brahma*', etc. The answer to the question raised above has been given before: By these *sādhana*s we are not realizing the goal as such but merely removing the dirt in us which is preventing us from reaching the goal. This dirt is, essentially, ignorance of our nature as Atman, and when it is removed the Self is, so to say, reflected on the purified mirror of our *antaḥ-karāṇa*, inner organ, the mind. Thus, by *sādhana* we get rid of our self-imposed limitations. So Vedānta says that by *sādhana* we can attain the *nitya-vastu*, eternal Reality, Brahman, for we are not creating Atman or Brahman by *sādhana* but disabusing ourselves of the wrong ideas we have gathered in our understanding.

Besides practising the various spiritual disciplines, one must be, as stated earlier, a *mahāśālā*, well talented, successful in managing himself and his temporal affairs with practical common sense. Study of Vedānta or desire for discovering one's own Reality does not mean that one has to be impractical or devoid of common sense. One must be a man of the world, with one's feet firmly planted on the earth, but with head, and

mind, high up—capable of dealing with the subtleties of this knowledge.

Way to Unfoldment

The traditional method of *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana* must be followed; it is a tested procedure. *Śravaṇa* is interacting and exchanging notes on a point we want to discuss thoroughly. We should study, listen and discuss till we are intellectually convinced that this is the right method for coming out of our present situation—ignorance and its concomitant misery. But then, we see that however clear our intellectual understanding may be, it can still get confused soon because the hold on this idea loosens after a time when past thoughts and other interests of life keep intruding into our minds. Therefore, to counter this, *manana*, recollection, is prescribed. *Manana* is needed to keep alive the flow of thought concerning our spiritual goal without allowing interruption by contrary thoughts. We should keep ruminating over these ideas and clear all doubts; this means sustenance of the process of intellectual understanding after one is fairly convinced through *śravaṇa*. So many *vṛttis*, thought-waves, keep coming up in the mind. Only those having a bearing on our *śravaṇa* and *manana* are to be specially nurtured, and contrary thought must be thrown out of the mind. We should so discipline our minds that even the inmost contents of the mind are known to us. This requires great perseverance and alertness.

Next comes *nididhyāsana*. A person who has by *manana* crystallized these ideas in his mind, despite having to interact with the

world, keeps undergoing an inner transformation and gets saturated with the thought of Divinity. Consequently, his mind and behaviour are no longer dirty or worldly at all; he is divinizing himself through deep meditation and concentration. The more eager one is to divinize oneself, the less difficulty one feels in following the disciplines, and the more joy one finds in them. Thus *sādhana* here means *śravaṇa*, *manana*, *nididhyāsana*. Now we are at the stage of *śravaṇa* as we begin the second Muṇḍaka.

Superimposition and Contradiction

If the *Akṣara* is beyond the normal perception and conception, what is the point in wasting our time on this subject? No, there must be some way of understanding and realizing the *Akṣara*. This position is made clear by the Upaniṣad. The *mantra* I.1.6 described the *Akṣara* immediately after defining *aparā-vidyā*. We mentioned there that following the normal method of experiencing one cannot comprehend the *Akṣara*, and so the method of *adhyāropa-apavāda*,—superimposing something (the world of appearance) on the Reality and then contradicting it (the appearance)—, is adopted. This method of Vedānta is not prevalent in modern education and hence it appears vague and clumsy, though it is very direct.

The word *adhyāropa* is derived by combining *adhi*, meaning *on* or *above*, with *āropa*, meaning *imposition*. Thus, in *āropa* something is projected on something else which serves as the basis. As a result of *āropa*, we perceive the original object, the substratum, as something other than itself. Next comes *apavāda*, which entails the *contradiction*, the negation, the peeling away of whatever was superimposed. In other words, we must contradict our previous experience and say, 'The object is really not as I perceived it, but is something else.' The stock example is of someone pointing out a snake to another person, who gets scared thereby, and next, of bringing a lamp and revealing that it is really a piece of rope that looks like a snake

through illusion. If we go through this snake-experience once, never again in our lifetime shall we ever get confused like that. *Adhyāropa* is thus a superimposition of a non-existent something on some other real thing, that superimposed object having no reality whatever; it was never there, is not there, and will never be there.

The teacher, with a view to enlightening us later, admits our illusory experience to be a fact, because we are at present in this state of delusion. Till the time we are not convinced that the 'snake' is a rope, the snake is the reality for us, like our own existence. At present the world is a reality, and we do not feel that it is illusory (*mithyā*) or a dream (*svapna*). So, we start from the point that the world is real, concrete and tangible; for, our whole being is involved in it. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that it is all very well to say that the world does not exist, but if even a thorn pricks our body, we weep and wail in agony. There is another example: Sometimes in sleep you may dream that your near and dear friend has died, and you weep while asleep. But then you wake up and realize that it was only a dream. The waking experience contradicts the dream experience. Yet the fact is that you find your pillow wet with your tears. You wept in the dream because in that state of awareness the loss of the friend *was* real.

So these examples show that, being in our present state, it is unrealistic to say that the world is *mithyā*. Hence, the teacher must find the best and easiest way to guide us from this level where we think the world is real to the level of awareness in which its unreality dawns upon us. That was the challenge to the Upaniṣadic teacher who had to teach that there is only one Reality and that the world is merely an appearance. He must take us from where we are now to a new level of awareness, to the pinnacle. Then we can see existence from a new perspective, from the correct perspective, like being able to see the plains, far below, better from a

mountain top.

Cosmology—A Superimposition

The second Muṇḍaka deals with the Source from which all things emanate, in Which they exist, and into Which they merge. The *Sṛṣṭi-tattva* (cosmology) explains what the world evolves from and into what it involves; how it comes into being and how it will disintegrate. The person who is established in the *adhiṣṭhāna*, the substratum, of this cosmos is a free man, but the ignorant have to go through the procedure of *adhyāropa-apavāda*.

We who are mistaken have to be enlightened as to why we see the snake in the rope. The teacher says that some similarity between the substratum and what is superimposed, and the law of association are the causes of this erroneous perception. Further, there is a lack of verification. So we see something there that does not exist in reality. Then we have to go in reverse order through that whole process involved in wrong perception and get back to the knowledge of the rope as a rope.

Similarly, we now see ourselves, other individuals, and all things in the cosmos as separate from each other. So we have to go in reverse order—with the help of *apavāda*, *śravaṇa*, etc.—through the cosmic evolutionary process to reach the original thing, the 'rope' or Brahman. The 'rope' or Brahman, as such, is always there—even when we see the 'snake' or the world created by our imagination. The basis of snake-perception is ignorance about the truth of rope. Similarly, the oneness of the world is there even when we see it as diverse. Only, for the time being, its true nature is concealed from our understanding. The Upaniṣads explain it by saying that the snake-world multiplicity is our own creation through *ajñāna*, ignorance.

The logicians say that the process of reaching the roof by climbing the staircase in the dark is to use a long chain leading to the staircase. One needs to take hold of the first link in the chain, then successively the

next, till the links end. One thus comes to the stairs climbing which one reaches the roof without the fear of falling down. So also, we have to understand the first link in the superimposition of the snake on the rope. With that knowledge we gradually proceed to gain the knowledge of Brahman on Whom this world is superimposed.

The link here is *ajñāna* (ignorance) which has two aspects. Our *ajñāna* has covered the true nature of the rope from us: this is the *āvaraṇa śakti* (veiling power) of *ajñāna*. And *vikṣepa* or projection is the other aspect of *ajñāna*. Instead of not seeing the object as it is, we see something else in its place. There is not only concealment of the original nature but there is also the superimposition of something else upon it. The problem is that the One Existence is not within the experience of the student. He has only heard about it. How to relate the One Existence to the world of variety and diversity which the student perceives? The teacher makes use of the *Sṛṣṭi-tattva* for this purpose but says that it is to be *explained away* ultimately. In the ultimate analysis it has no philosophical meaning. It is an explanation by means of which the student can eventually come to the Ultimate Truth. So the teacher starts with the cosmos with its infinite diversity and by showing the contradiction in the student's previous experience, draws him slowly and successively to the Essence of all this, the unity. The false perception of diversity in place of unity is the *adhyāropa* and the contradiction of it is the *apavāda*, which results in the correct perception of unity. Thus the purpose of Upaniṣadic study is to train us to contradict our cherished view regarding the world and ourselves and bring us to the awareness of the one Existence, the Reality.

Four Levels of Awareness and Truth

To try to understand even rationally the Supreme Being, Brahman, we have to understand first the four levels of our awareness. The first is *prapañca upaśama śānta*, the *suṣupti*: The world does not exist for us in

suṣupti, dreamless deep sleep. About our experience in that state, we say, 'I had great joy and tranquillity. I was not aware of anything.' But an analysis of this statement shows that we are aware on waking that we were not aware of anything in deep sleep. Our self-awareness did not disappear during deep sleep, for we say, 'I had sound sleep.' So the awareness of 'I' or 'am-ness' was present in deep sleep; only, the awareness of the *jagat prapañca* did not infiltrate into my mind, and the world totally ceased to exist as it were. The second level is *svapna-avasthā*, dream state, in which the mind creates a dream world which is based on the *jagat prapañca* of the waking state. During dream we do not realize our experiences to be a dream. For the time being it is real and such a feeling does not exist in *suṣupti*. The third state or *jāgrat-avasthā* is the waking experience which has *vyavahārika sattā*, relative existence. In this state we confidently rely on the report of the five senses and interact with everything in the world on the basis of this sensory perception.

In waking state we are experiencers, there is a process of experience, and there are objects experienced by us. The *tripuṭi* (three-fold) of *jñātā-jñāna-jñeya* (knower, knowledge, and known) operates. We now perceive the *jagat prapañca* of time-space-causation and we are linked to whatever we perceive. We next remember going to sleep, and on waking we are aware of *our* continuity because awareness is centred around ourselves in all the three states, even though each state is interrupted by the other two states periodically. By applying the standard of comparison of experiences based on their *durability* and *continuity*, we say one state is false and another is true. That is, before we go to sleep we know where we are, and the circumstances we are placed in; we sleep and dream, but on waking, the dream is known to be a myth because, firstly, it is *bādhita*, refuted, contradicted by the waking experience. Secondly, we do not

dream serially and have no continuity between successive dream experiences, while on waking, we observe that our experiences in the waking state are serialized and continuous, and fortunately or unfortunately not contradicted by anything for the present. In *svapna*, we are victims of our *samskāras* which operate at random uncontrolled by us. But in *jāgrat*, continuity and control are both there. So the waking state has a tremendous hold on us. Also, *suṣupti* has a very small duration, *svapna* a longer duration, and *jāgrat-avasthā*, the longest duration in our lifetime. So we call *suṣupti* and *svapna* false, *mithyā*. *Suṣupti* is contradicted by the experience of *svapna* and *svapna* is contradicted by the experience of *jāgrat*. Further, the sense of continuity of experience in *jāgrat* (before and after a dream) is not dislocated by dream experience. So by our standard, *jāgrat* is real and the other experiences are false.

The fourth and final experience is *turiya*, where the appearance we superimpose on the Reality behind ourselves and the *jagat prapañca* is contradicted (*bādhita*) by our experience of Reality—Absolute Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. In this process of elimination, the *jīva* realizes that he cannot be the sheaths—*anna* (body), *prāṇa* (life-breath), *mana* (mind), or *buddhi* (consciousness)—, but that he is *Saccidānanda* in his *svarūpa* or nature, and is absolutely free pervading the sheaths and even extending beyond them.

When the body-consciousness disappears in *suṣupti*, we experience the Bliss of Brahman being drawn into *suṣupti* effortlessly and unconsciously. So in the words of Swami Vivekananda, we go into *suṣupti* and come out of it without enlightenment or deeper experience of Truth, while an unenlightened *jīva* enters *samādhi* and comes out a saint, a man of Self-knowledge. That is the difference between the *prapañca upaśama* in *suṣupti* and *turiya*. We enter *turiya* consciously through hard diligent effort, guidance of the Guru and grace of God. Therein

we go beyond the limitations of the body and merge with the source of cosmic existence. Then we rest in the Absolute whatever the mind may be engaged in.¹ In *turiya*, the world, to others, remains as such, but our perspective undergoes a total change. For instance, one sees in an object its utility; a second beholds it as a thing of beauty because of his aesthetic taste which the first one lacks; a third one who is a chemist knows also the material out of which the thing is made; a fourth person, a physicist, says that matter is really energy; a fifth person who has undergone the *turiya* experience knows that what the physicist calls cosmic energy, expresses itself through millions of forms including himself and realizes it as Atman or Brahman. He is a scientist with a spiritual outlook who has, in *turiya*, identified his essence with that of the universe as 'I am That'. This is the *jñānis*' experience which cannot be described: Words and thoughts return unable to express It because It is beyond relative perception. There all mentation stops.²

So *bodha-svarūpa-jñāna* cannot be described. Sri Ramakrishna tried to explain his experience of going into *samādhi* and, unable to state what happens when the mind arrives at the *anāhata cakra*, wept and said that the Divine Mother was not allowing him to express his experiences in this plane of awareness. When there is only non-dual existence, how is it possible to express It in communication which is possible only on a dual plane? In this meditative state the *bodha-svarūpa*-Atman is established in the experience of One-without-a-second. There are persons who do not come out of this *samādhi* and their bodies fall off, because the *triguṇātmikā* (composed of three qualities)

body is unable to bear the onrush of the spiritual experience of the oneness of the universe. But some rare individuals, because of Divine will, come out of *turiya* to the level of normal consciousness. For them the world of *māyā* continues to remain as it was, but their perspective undergoes a 'sea-change'. Before going into *nirvikalpa samādhi*, the world appeared real, tangible, continuous, and a part and parcel of their being. But after *nirvikalpa samādhi* though objects are seen with the eyes, the memory of the experience of Reality lingers. All divisions and distinctions born of time-space-causation-utility, of name-form, vanish forever. People and things are now seen as the Atman. The Upaniṣad says that even in the fast moving current of the Himalayan rivers, big fish playfully swim from one bank to the other and the current of water has no effect on them. The *jīva*'s awareness is from the level of *susupti* to the level of *jāgrat* and he is tossed about in *saṁsāra*, but the person who has attained to *turiya* is like the big fish. For him the *jagat prapañca* disappears forever and he remains undisturbed despite happy and sad experiences of life.

The concept of a Being infinitely greater than ourself, will be the sum total of all existence in the cosmos. Just as one cannot conceive of the snake without an *adhiṣṭhāna*, the substratum, the rope, even so a substratum is necessary for the *adhyāsa* (superimposition) which is *apavādita* (contradicted). We are in error of seeing multiplicity in the world instead of the One. The many must converge and the sense of manifoldness disappear revealing the Unitary Existence. This is the basis of *Īśvara*: a Being with all the faculties of man multiplied infinitely. We, being human, can only conceive of *Īśvara* anthropomorphically. However, He too does not exist just as the snake does not exist. Only the 'rope' or Brahman or Atman exists. It is now being described in the second Muṇḍaka.

(to be continued)

1. *Dehābhimāne galite vijñāte paramātmāni;*

Yatra yatra mano yāti tatra tatra param padam.

—*Sarasvatirahasyopaniṣad*, 55, *Dr̥g-Dr̥ṣya Viveka*, 30.

2. *Yato vāco nivartante aprāpya manasā saha.*

—*Taittirīyopaniṣad*, 2.4, 2.9.

Sri Ramakrishna and the Ideal of Seva

SWAMI GAMBHIRANANDA

In this article, the eleventh President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission highlights that "Seva-yoga" is a unique message that Sri Ramakrishna has delivered for this age, which can be taken up not only by monks but even by lay people. When they are engaged in their everyday household work, the lay people also can practise this Seva by thinking of their family members as representatives of God Himself, and their families as trusts given to them for proper service.' Seva-yoga necessarily requires faith in God as the principle is Śiva-jñāne jīva sevā. This ideal lies at the root of the founding of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission by Swamiji. Revered Maharaj also points out how in this ideal is also inherent the synthesis of Jñāna, Bhakti, Karma and Yoga.

To understand Sri Ramakrishna's ideal of service (*seva*) we should understand the difference between *seva* as service of God and Karma-yoga as it is traditionally understood.

It is recorded in the *Līlāprasaṅga* (translated into English as *Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master*) by Swami Saradananda that when Sri Ramakrishna was one day explaining the tenets of the Vaiṣṇava cult, he said that we should not speak of compassion in the context of man's relationship with his fellow-men. For compassion belongs to God alone. What, then, can man do? Man can only worship or serve others, regarding them as God.

Now, this is a monistic standpoint because no dualist or a qualified monist will admit that the *jīvā*, the individual soul, and Śiva, God, are identical. It is only the monist who does so. Hence the background of Seva (service to man as God) is monism. So far about the ideal set before us. Now we have to consider the people who serve and the nature of service. What do we mean by service, Seva? In this connection a well-known verse in the *Gītā* becomes significant. It states: 'The ladle is Brahman; the oblation is

Brahman; the fire is Brahman; the man who does this offering is Brahman; and his goal is to reach Brahman by thinking of this act as Brahman Itself.'¹ Here we see that, according to the Gita, everything is to be considered a manifestation of Brahman.

This is the ideal that is taken up in Seva. But you may say, that is too high an ideal which does not conform to the actual experience of the people engaged in Seva. Sri Ramakrishna also was a realist. He said that, so long as one had body-consciousness, one could not leave out Personal God or the world as non-existent, but had to admit God and the world as existing separately from himself. This state of knowledge, as you know, is a stage in spiritual progress. When we go through the different teachings of Sri Ramakrishna recorded in the *Līlāprasaṅga* and the *Kathāmṛta*, we find that he talked about not only monism but also of qualified monism and dualism as well. His idea is that one progresses vertically from dualism to qualified monism and then to monism, and through monism to identity with the Reality

1. ब्रह्मार्पणं ब्रह्म हविर्ब्रह्माग्नौ ब्रह्मणा हुतम्।

ब्रह्मैव तेन गन्तव्यं ब्रह्मकर्मसमाधिना॥ —*Gītā*, 4.24.

behind the world of manifested Maya. Again, after realizing the highest Truth, Incarnations and Prophets, and some divinely commissioned saints also, can come down to the lower planes; and they can move from one plane of consciousness to another just as they will. From dualism they can go to qualified monism, from qualified monism again to monism, and also from monism to dualism—and so on back and forth, as they wish. This accords with the attitude of Hanuman who, in answer to Ramachandra's question as to how he thought of Him, said: 'When I think of myself as a body, I am your servant; when I think of myself as a *jīvā* (as a soul living in a body) then I am a part of Yours; and when I think of myself as the Self, then I am one with You.'² This is the idea involved in the philosophy of Seva also. We proceed higher by stages till we reach the ultimate Reality.

Now let us turn to Karma-yoga. What does 'karma' really mean? To quote from the Gita again: 'Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in oblation or in charity, and whatever austerity you undertake, you dedicate all that to Me.'³ All types of work are comprehended in this verse. Here Śrī Kṛṣṇa seems to have thought of work in a very wide sense. This view is held by Madhusūdana Sarasvati in his annotation on the Gita. But Śaṅkarācārya and some other commentators and annotators do not generalize in that way when writing on Karma-yoga. They hold that only rites and duties sanctioned by the scriptures are involved in Karma-yoga. According to their view, in Karma-yoga you are to work without the ideal of agentship and you have to offer the result of your work to God.

Next, what does 'yoga' mean? It literally means association or combination. Here

it means the union of the individual self with God. So a dualistic conception of Reality underlies Karma-yoga—as they explain it. Through Karma I become associated with God. But how? Śaṅkarācārya explains that karma only purifies our minds, and he is firm that this karma can never be combined with Jñāna, Knowledge.

But, in Seva, or if I may call it 'Seva-yoga', we have seen that it is directly concerned with God, without meditation or earning some fruit and offering it to God.

According to Śaṅkarācārya, karma purifies our minds and through that purification comes bhakti, devotion; and from bhakti comes jñāna, enlightenment; and through that we become freed from the world. These are the stages through which one has to pass in the practice of Karma-yoga. But he seems to stumble when he comes to explaining the first line of the Gita verse, *karmanaiiva hi saṁsiddhim āsthitā Janakādayaḥ*⁴ (I shall explain the word *saṁsiddhi* later on) 'Janaka and others remained poised in *saṁsiddhi* through karma and *along with* karma.' Both meanings are accepted by Śaṅkarācārya: *through* karma and *along with* karma. Śaṅkarācārya first explains *saṁsiddhi* as 'purification of mind'. Janaka and others remained poised in the state of purified minds, *karmanā*, through karma. Karma helped them to purify their minds, and they remained established in that state of *saṁsiddhi*, purified minds, through Karma-yoga. But the word *saṁsiddhi* literally means 'complete or full *siddhi*', full success, and not mere *siddhi*, success. so it should mean Liberation, full identification with the ultimate Reality. Accepting this alternative meaning, Śaṅkarācārya argues that in that context *karmanā* means *karmanā saha*, 'along with karma'. So Janaka and others remained poised in Liberation along with karma, along with work. That means, although they became liberated, and work

2. देहबुद्ध्या तु दासोऽस्मि जीवबुद्ध्या त्वदंशकः।

आत्मबुद्ध्या त्वमेवाहमिति मे निश्चिता मतिः॥

3. यत् करोषि यदश्नासि यज्जुहोषि ददासि यत्।

यत्तपस्यसि कौन्तेय तत् कुरुष्व मदर्पणम्॥ —Gītā, 9.27.

4. Gītā, 3.20.

should have dropped off from their personalities, still it somehow persisted—may be for the fulfilment of some purpose of God. In this way Śaṅkarācārya makes a sort of a compromise. He himself reconciles the apparent contradiction between his two interpretations by saying that when the idea of agentship and acquisition of any personal gain are knocked out of work, then work itself ceases to be so in the ordinary sense. It then becomes equivalent to enlightenment. Janaka and others set an ideal way of life to be imitated by other people for their own good. Śaṅkarācārya says that the spiritual characteristics of the successful ones are placed before us for being imitated so that we may in that way go higher up.

In Seva we accept these ideals by freeing ourselves from egoism and hankering for personal rewards while doing any work for others. My knowledge of the ideal, my endeavour to attain the ideal—all these can somehow go along with my work. This is how I understand Śaṅkarācārya and Sri Ramakrishna together. It should be noted that in Seva there is no such thing as 'offering the result to God'. Because, God is directly worshipped in Seva; the person worshipped or served is God Himself. And what do I get through that worship? I get only spiritual benefit out of it. There is nothing to be *offered* to God. So no personal result accrues from my service to others which I can offer to God. This is how Seva differs from Karma-yoga.

There is one more difference. The Karma-yogin may not believe in God. Swamiji said Buddha was the greatest Karma-yogin. I do not know if Buddha ever believed in God or not; at least he avoided talking about Him. So, even a man who does not believe in God can become a Karma-yogin. The old Mīmāṃsakas also did not care much about God—not even the gods such as Indra, Rudra, Varuṇa and others. According to them what a man ought to do was to simply follow the Vedas, perform the

rituals, and through that he would reach heaven. Heaven was the highest result that he could get. Karma-yoga for all the Mīmāṃsakas meant some ritual without God, a Godless-work. But Seva is not Godless. We have to believe in God and that it is God Himself whom we are worshipping through our service.

Another beauty of Seva has been noted in the *Līlāprasaṅga*. Swamiji, on the very day he heard this utterance of Sri Ramakrishna—*Śiva-jñāne jīva sevā*—said, 'I have received a unique message, and if God gives me an opportunity I shall show the world what it means.' The result has been the foundation of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. And Swamiji also remarked that there, in that utterance, he found the reconciliation or synthesis of Jñāna, Bhakti and Karma. I also add that there is a synthesis of meditation, yoga, as well. And this is the natural way for man. We think, we love, we meditate, we work—we do all these things naturally. What is natural to a man in his ordinary life can be easily transposed to his spiritual field as well. There also we can serve others, do work, become active in the welfare of others. Why? Because we love them as forms of God. So Bhakti also comes in there. All these will lead us to the highest Reality, through deliberation on the ultimate Goal. This, again, is Jñāna. And, when we are faced with any problem we cannot solve, we meditate and call on God to show us the path. Thus meditation also comes in. In this way, all the four paths become combined, associated together, in our progress through Seva. Therefore I say, 'Seva-yoga' is a unique message that Sri Ramakrishna has delivered for this age, which can be taken up not only by monks but even by lay people. When they are engaged in their everyday household work, the lay people also can practise this Seva by thinking of their family members as representatives of God Himself, and their families as trusts given to them for proper service. □

Ideal Behind Ramakrishna Mission Activities

SWAMI BHUTESHANANDA

Revered Maharaj, President of the Ramakrishna Order, points out that work performed in the right spirit—in the spirit of Yoga, leads to salvation and Ultimate Goal of life.

The report on the working of the Ramakrishna Mission for the last year along with a brief reference to the activities of the Math Centres has been presented to us. The report shows the amount of work that the Mission is carrying on in spite of all the difficulties our country is passing through. This work is sufficiently burdensome for the Organization in its present capacity. But with your help and cooperation—the dedication of the monastic workers and our lay friends—the work is going on more or less smoothly, though we feel at every step that difficulties are increasing day by day. I believe our work is satisfactory considering the amount of difficulties we face. Behind the work there is one unfailing strength, and that is the inspiration of the great originators of our movement—Swami Vivekananda and his Master, Sri Ramakrishna.

However we have to be careful not to forget the ideal that inspires us in this work. We have to remain faithful to the ideal; then only has the work its value by spiritual considerations. Ours is a spiritual organization and in it the spiritual ideal is not dissociated from the secular services it carries on, be-

cause according to our ideal, nothing is secular—everything is spiritual. Whatever the Mission is trying to do is for the service of human beings who are to be looked upon as embodiments of Divinity. That is the ideal placed before us and we have to be alert always and careful that we are carrying on this work without budging an inch from this ideal set before us by Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. That ideal has to be our guide always.

It is not the amount of work that is done that matters so much as the spirit with which it is done. We have to analyse our own selves frequently and see that we are doing the work faithfully according to the ideal. The spirit of service amounts to the worship of God in man—this has to be borne in mind. This has to be the standard by which the activities of the Mission are to be judged. Ours is not a social service organization. It is an organization with the ideal of attaining our spiritual uplift through service to humanity. The twin ideals: *Ātmano Mokṣārtham, Jagaddhitāya ca*, “for the liberation of one’s own Self and the service of the world” should be our guiding motto; without that our work has no value. Then alone can we claim to be the workers of the Mission and the followers of Swami Vivekananda’s command. Others might judge our work by its volume, but we should judge ourselves with reference to the ideal we have before

* Chairman’s Address given by Most Revered Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, before the 81st Annual General Meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission held at Belur Math on 23 December 1990.

Ramakrishna Mission:

Swamiji's Vision and Fulfilment

SWAMI ATMASTHANANDA

Revered Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, discusses in this lucid article such questions as: 'What was the idea Swamiji had in mind when he founded the Ramakrishna Mission? What prompted him to bring together monks and householders under the banner of a single organization? What did he want to accomplish through the Ramakrishna Mission?' He points out that 'Uplift of the poor masses, work as worship, dissemination of both spiritual knowledge and secular knowledge, organizational integrity and efficiency—these are some of the main ideals that Swami Vivekananda set for the Ramakrishna Mission.' Revered Maharaj also emphasizes that 'Swamiji conceived the Mission not as a social organization but as a spiritual organization. Spiritual orientation forms the basic thrust of the Ramakrishna Mission.'

Like many other great things in the world, the Ramakrishna Mission had a very humble beginning. It began a hundred years ago on the first of May when a small group of monks and lay devotees of Sri Ramakrishna met in the hall of Balaram Basu's house in Baghbazar, Calcutta. There were no press reporters, no media men, no clicking of cameras, no crowds. The outside world knew nothing of the meeting. But, as it turned out later on, it was one of the most momentous meetings in recent history—perhaps far more significant in the long run than the meetings of politicians and military generals about which we read in history books. The monks and lay devotees had assembled in response to a call given by one of the greatest spiritual leaders of mankind, and the meeting brought into existence one of the most spiritual organizations in the world working for the welfare of mankind.

What was the idea Swamiji had in mind when he founded the Ramakrishna Mission? What prompted him to bring together

monks and householders under the banner of a single organization? What did he want to accomplish through the Ramakrishna Mission?

A hundred years later these questions have now assumed a new significance. In the short address that Swamiji gave at the inaugural meeting we don't find many details of the ideology and plan of action that he had envisioned for the Ramakrishna Mission. It however contains two key ideas: the importance of having an organization and, secondly, making it a practical demonstration of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. To quote Swamiji's own words,

From my travels in various countries I have come to the conclusion that without an organization nothing great and permanent can be done.... This Association will bear the name of him in whose name we have become Sannyasins; him, taking whom as your ideal you are leading the householder life in the field of activity—this Samsara; him whose holy

name and the influence of whose unique life and teachings have within twelve years of his demise spread in such an unthought of way both in the East and the West.... We are but servants of the Master. May you all help in this work.¹

It has to be clearly understood that the idea of founding the Ramakrishna Mission was taken up by Swamiji not in a sudden flash of inspiration or in imitation of western institutions. The idea of starting a service-oriented spiritual organization developed in Swamiji's mind in the course of his travels all over India as a mendicant monk after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna.

Swamiji's travels in India were not like the wandering of 'an ordinary monk who undertakes it as a way of life and discipline. His travels were travels of observation and discovery. He saw with his own eyes the depths of poverty, squalor and ignorance to which millions of people in India had sunk. The vast majority of people in India were steeped in *tamas*, inertia. Centuries of foreign domination and exploitation had reduced the people to the level of hopeless dependence and diffidence. As he himself expressed it later on, 'Being a conquered race we have brought ourselves to believe that we are weak and have no independence in anything.'² 'The whole national character is one of childish dependence. They are all ready to enjoy food if it is brought to their mouth, and some even want it pushed down.'³

In the course of his travels in India, Swamiji sometimes lived in the palaces of the rulers of princely states but he also often stayed with the poor peasants, cobblers and sweepers in their cottages sharing their meal. This enabled him to feel the pulse of

national life. His great heart bled to see the depths of poverty to which the poor masses in India had sunk. At the same time he also observed that in spite of 'chill penury' the poor people in India, most of whom lived in villages, were moral, honest, hardworking, kind and loving, and were endowed with the spirit of self-sacrifice and service. Suffering had conferred upon them the power to forbear and endure suffering. Above all, they were deeply spiritual. From where did the masses get their morality, love, strength and spirituality? Swamiji saw that they had imbibed these virtues from the ancient religious culture of the land. In spite of poverty and backwardness, the stream of spirituality had been running clear in India.

From these observations Swamiji came to an important conclusion: the real strength of the nation lay in its masses and it was the neglect of the masses that was one of the major causes of the downfall of India. To quote his words:

I consider that the great national sin is the neglect of the masses, and that is one of the causes of her downfall. No amount of politics would be of any avail until the masses in India are once more well educated, well fed, and well cared for. They pay for our education, they build temples, but in return they get kicks. If we want to regenerate India, we must work for them.⁴

It may be mentioned here that in the nineteenth century there were several reform movements in India, especially in Bengal. What is surprising is that none of the religious leaders of these movements held that the neglect of the masses was the chief cause of India's degradation. Indeed, they put all the blame on the ancient religion of the land.

Swami Vivekananda took a totally different stand. He pointed out that the ills of the Indian nation and society were caused

1. Cf. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 6, pp. 476-7. [Hereafter, CW].

2. CW, vol. 5, p. 332.

3. CW, vol. 5, p. 67.

4. CW, vol. 5, p. 222-3.

not by religion as such but by the fact that the eternal life-giving principles of religion had not been applied in practical life. He stated:

I claim no destruction of religion is necessary to improve Hindu society, and that this state of society exists not on account of religion, but because religion has not been applied to society as it should have been.⁵

Swamiji held that what is popularly known as religion consists of both essential and non-essential elements. The eternal truths and laws of spiritual life constitute the essentials of religion. These essential elements of religion have a wonderful power to free man from bondage, ignorance and suffering and bring him everlasting peace and bliss. Swamiji believed that the degeneration of India happened because these essential truths were monopolized by a few upper caste and rich people whereas the poor masses were denied the benefit of them. So, according to Swamiji, the most important step towards the rejuvenation of India is to bring out the essential life-giving truths of religion and make them available to the masses. As Swamiji himself expressed it:

So every improvement in India requires first of all an upheaval in religion. Before flooding India with socialistic or political ideas, first deluge the land with spiritual ideas. The first work that demands our attention is that the most wonderful truths confined in our scriptures must be brought out from the books... brought out from the possession of selected bodies of people, and scattered broadcast all over the land so that the truths may run like fire all over the country from north to south and east to west...⁶

Because of centuries of suppression,

oppression and exploitation, the poor masses had lost their individuality, self-reliance and initiative. What they needed most was a message that will give them faith in themselves, hope for a bright future, and strength to overcome obstacles. Swamiji believed that the Upanishads contained all the essential elements of such an uplifting message. 'Go back to the Upanishads,'⁷ he told the people of India.

The Upanishads are the great mine of strength. Therein lies strength enough to invigorate the whole world. The whole world can be vivified, made strong, energized through them. They will call with trumpet voice upon the weak, the miserable and the downtrodden of all races, all creeds and all sects, to stand on their feet and be free; freedom, physical freedom, mental freedom and spiritual freedom are the watchword of the Upanishads.⁸

Swamiji, however, knew only too well the truth of his Master's statement, 'Religion is not for empty stomachs.' The most urgent need of India was food, and millions of people were living at the level of destitution. Hence Swamiji told his followers:

First of all, you must remove this evil of hunger and starvation, this anxiety for bare existence, from those to whom you want to preach religion. Otherwise, lectures and such things will be of no benefit.⁹

During his stay in the United States, Swamiji had been deeply impressed by the stupendous material prosperity that the nation had attained. It was clear to him that if India was to provide even the bare necessities of food, clothing and shelter for its millions of poor people, it should learn Western science, technology and business organization. Swamiji also saw that modern ideas of democracy could have a liberating influence

5. CW, vol. 5, pp. 47-8.

6. CW, vol. 3, p. 221.

7. Cf. CW, vol. 3, p. 345.

8. CW, vol. 3, p. 238.

9. CW, vol. 5, p. 380.

on the minds of the people held down by superstitions, caste restrictions and village customs. Thus secular knowledge is quite as important as spiritual knowledge for the regeneration of India.

How to spread these two types of knowledge among the masses? This was the big problem that Swamiji was thinking about all through his travels in India. Of course, spreading knowledge means spreading education. How to spread education among the millions of poor people ruled by an alien Government? It was not possible to open thousands of schools in the villages many of which were remote and utterly backward. Even if schools were opened, the people were too poor to send their children to school.

Swamiji saw that a mighty social machinery was needed to make mass education a feasible proposition. In one of his early letters from the West, Swamiji expressed his view thus:

My whole ambition in life is to set in motion a machinery which will bring noble ideas to the doors of everybody; and then let men and women settle their own fate.¹⁰

What was the 'machinery' that Swamiji was thinking of? In the first place, it is clear that social service calls for tremendous self-sacrifice, and Swamiji had in mind the work of a large number of dedicated workers who were prepared to undergo any sacrifice for the welfare of the world. He said,

Then only will India awake when hundreds of large-hearted men and women, giving up all desire of enjoying the luxuries of life, will long and exert themselves to their utmost for the well being of the millions of their countrymen who are gradually sinking lower and lower in the vortex of destitution and ignorance.¹¹

Who can be more unselfish than monks who have given up their hearth and home for the sake of God? Hence Swamiji decided to harness monastic manpower and utilize it for the uplift of Indian society. Explaining his plan, he asked:

Suppose some disinterested Sannyasins, bent on doing good to others, go from village to village, disseminating education, and seeking in various ways to better the condition of all down to the Chandala, through oral teaching, and by means of maps, cameras, globes and such other accessories—can't that bring forth good in time?¹²

But in the age-old monastic tradition of India, Hindu monks led a wandering life and regarded themselves as above all compulsions for social service. Swamiji gave a new ideal of monastic life which looks upon Karma Yoga as a direct means to liberation. He raised work to the level of worship, worship of the one Supreme Spirit dwelling in all as the inner Self. This doctrine of work as worship was based on the non-dual nature of the Supreme Reality known as Brahman which is the central principle of Vedanta.

Swamiji, however, knew that setting new ideals, propounding new doctrines and popularizing new practices would be effective and long-lasting only if they were backed by a strong organization. Travelling all over India he saw the hopelessly disorganized condition of Indian society and the lack of collective awareness and responsibility. Later on, he could contrast it with the highly organized western societies. When society is well organized, there is greater social awareness and self-discipline, and social evils are quickly remedied. When society is in a disorganized condition, as it was in India during Swamiji's time, it needs a powerful organization to create proper social awareness, to spread noble ideas and unify human wills. As Swamiji has put it,

10. CW, vol. 5, p. 29.

11. CW, vol. 5, p. 127.

12. CW, vol. 6, pp. 254-5.

Therefore to make a great future India the whole secret lies in organization, accumulation of power, coordination of wills... Being of one mind is the secret of society... For mark you, the future India depends entirely upon that.¹³

Swami Vivekananda had thought deeply about, and even expressed, all the ideas mentioned above before he called the meeting of monastic brothers and lay devotees on the first of May, 1897 at Balaram Babu's house. Uplift of the poor masses, work as worship, dissemination of both spiritual knowledge and secular knowledge, organizational integrity and efficiency—these are some of the main ideals that Swami Vivekananda set for the Ramakrishna Mission.

It should however be clearly understood that Swamiji conceived the Mission not as a social organization but as a spiritual organization. Spiritual orientation forms the basic thrust of the Ramakrishna Mission. All its activities are undertaken not as an end in themselves but as a means to spiritual realization. Swamiji summed up the ideals and values that Ramakrishna Mission stands for in the motto that he gave to the Mission, '*Ātmano mokṣārtham jagaddhitāya ca*, For one's own liberation and for the welfare of the world.' Obviously, one's own spiritual goal, liberation, is not neglected; rather, it is considered as important as service to fellow-men.

Although the Ramakrishna Mission is a spiritual organization, it is not a religious organization in a narrow sectarian sense. It accepts all religions as different pathways to the same ultimate Reality and as different aspects of one eternal Universal Religion. The membership of the Mission is open to the followers of all religions who accept the ideals of the Mission and look upon Sri Ramakrishna as the embodiment of these ideals.

Being a spiritual organization, the Ramakrishna Mission has no connection whatsoever with politics, political ideologies, parties and activities. Right from its inception it has avoided involvement in political issues at the local, national and international levels. The Mission is also beyond all barriers raised by caste, culture, race, and nationality. It looks upon humanity as one undivided whole growing towards Divinity.

In this context it should be mentioned that although the idea of starting a service organization took shape in Swamiji's mind primarily as a response to the dire needs of the people of India, he was not unmindful of the needs of the people in other parts of the world. He saw that the West needed India's spiritual wealth as much as India needed western science and technology. And so he included the training of teachers to spread Vedanta in the West as an essential function of the Ramakrishna Mission. Swamiji's personality was universal in its dimensions and he was far above nationalist feelings. He loved India not merely because it was his motherland but also because it was the richest storehouse of spiritual treasures in the world. 'Shall India die?', he asked; 'Then from the world all spirituality will be extinct, all moral perfection will be extinct, all sweet-souled sympathy for religion will be extinct, all ideality will be extinct....'¹⁴

Lastly, the Ramakrishna Mission is centred on the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna. He is not only the main source of inspiration and exemplar, but the living guide and ultimate goal of all Ramakrishna Mission undertakings. There is no attempt to thrust his cult upon anybody, but he is respected as a world teacher or prophet who came with a message for the East and the West. Sri Ramakrishna embodied in himself all the spiritual glory of India's past whereas Swami Vivekananda embodied in himself

13. CW, vol. 3, p. 299.

14. CW, vol. 4, p. 348.

all the immense possibilities of the future. The combination of these two personalities gives the Ramakrishna Mission its real power and dynamism.

According to Swami Vivekananda, the national ideals of India are renunciation and service. Sri Ramakrishna was the supreme embodiment of these ideals. Hence, Swami Vivekananda spoke of Sri Ramakrishna as the national ideal of India. In the address given in Calcutta after his return from the West, Swamiji said,

Such a hero has been given to us in the person of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. If this nation wants to rise, take my word for it, it will have to rally enthusiastically round his name... In duty bound, therefore, for the good of our race, for the good of our religion, I place this great spiritual ideal before you.¹⁵

All the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission are a humble attempt to honour this ideal.

One hundred years have passed since Swami Vivekananda sowed the seeds of the Ramakrishna Mission. That seed sprouted and, watered by the life-blood of innumerable dedicated workers, it has now grown into a mighty tree. Together with the Ramakrishna Math, the Mission now has 135 branch centres all over the world. Impelled by the mighty spiritual power generated by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, the Ramakrishna Mission has been growing from strength to strength. Very few institutions started in the nineteenth century can claim such unimpeded growth.

Ramakrishna Mission's entry into the field of social service began in a very small way. It started when one day Swami Akhandananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, saw a young Muslim girl weeping. The earthen pot she was carrying had fallen and broken and she had no money to buy

another one. From enquiries Akhandananda learned that a famine was raging in that area which belonged to Murshidabad district in West Bengal. The first organized famine relief work of the Mission was started at Mahula in that district on 15 May 1897.

The famine left a few orphan children, and with them Swami Akhandananda started the first orphanage of the Mission. In April 1898 there was an outbreak of plague in Calcutta. Monks and devotees of the Mission immediately started relief measures which included not only nursing the sick but also sweeping streets and removing filth. Within three years medical relief work began in a very small way at Varanasi and Kankhal.

From these humble beginnings, through the tireless work of a number of monks and lay devotees, the work of the Ramakrishna Mission began to expand. Institutions began to multiply. Hospital after hospital, school after school, orphanage after orphanage came into existence. At present the Ramakrishna Mission and Math together run 14 hospitals, 92 out-patient dispensaries, 130 schools, 13 higher secondary schools, 5 degree colleges, 97 hostels and students' homes, 5 orphanages, more than 6000 non-formal educational centres, and a number of rural and tribal development centres.

As regards the dissemination of spiritual knowledge, every centre of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission regularly conducts religious classes and discourses. Devotees and seekers get spiritual guidance and counselling from monks in almost all the centres. Many centres organize seminars and retreats. There are two major publishing centres which bring out books in English and many other centres which publish books in regional languages. Apart from three monthly journals in English, the Mission brings out journals in most of the regional

(Continued on page 439)

15. CW, vol. 3, p. 315.

The Meaningful Liberation

SWAMI ADISWARANANDA

'Liberation of the soul is the promise and central teaching of all religions....' says the author in this lucid article which addresses itself to several questions: What is the meaning of liberation? What does one get liberated from? How does one become liberated? Can one attain to liberation here and now or in some future life? Does liberation depend on self-effort or divine grace? Can liberation be verified like scientific truths and, if so, how? What happens when one gets liberated? The author who is the spiritual leader of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, New York, points out that, 'Direct perception is experiencing the Self by being one with It; it is seeing the Self with eyes closed in meditation as well as with eyes open in action.'

THE MESSAGE OF LIBERATION

The motto of the Ramakrishna Mission is: 'For one's own liberation and for the good of the world'. Liberation is the goal of all the goals of life. Through acquisition of wealth, fulfilment of desires, pursuit of happiness, and attainment of knowledge, all are seeking liberation. Liberation is the motive force behind all morality and unselfishness. Prayer and meditation, charity and austerity, performance of sacraments and doing good to others, all culminate in liberation—the infinite expansion of the soul.

Liberation of the soul is the promise and central teaching of all religions. It is this promise that distinguishes religion from all other quests of life. Prophets and saints, mystics and philosophers, theologians and scriptures assure us of ultimate liberation from the pain and suffering of life. All seekers—whether Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, dualist, qualified non-dualist, or non-dualist—strive for liberation. All believe that through liberation they will attain immortality. The desire for immortality is inherent in human nature. Desiring immortality, people beget children, create works of art, erect monuments, sacrifice their self-interest, and practise charity, contemplation, and prayer. What is the meaning of libera-

tion? What happens to one who becomes liberated?

THE DIFFERING VIEWS

The consensus among religions is that liberation is eternal life in heaven and is possible only after death, as the reward for the virtuous and the believers. The non-believers and the sinners go to hell to expiate their wrongful actions on earth. Enjoyment in heaven and suffering in hell are described in vivid terms in the scriptures of different traditions. But the religions vary in their views of the nature of liberation, and how to attain and verify it. Some claim that liberation is reserved only for their own followers and ask for unquestioning faith in their dogma. Others assert that liberation is only for the elected and chosen ones—and not universal. Immortality for some is physical; for others, it is spiritual. Some insist that liberation is dependent on effort, while for others it is solely a matter of divine grace. Some traditions declare that the soul is created at birth and that life on earth is only for one term, and therefore there is only one opportunity to strive for liberation. Others speak of the soul's potential divine nature, its transmigration, and its many terms of life.

HONEST DOUBT

The questions that are often raised by the scientific-minded are the following:

(1) If liberation is possible only after death, how can its reality be verified? The dead do not return to testify about the validity of liberation. Scriptural assurances are not enough to silence our doubt, since, having been written by human hands, they are subject to human error. Could the ideas of liberation be merely the result of pious imagination? Such doubt persists. There is the story of a mountain climber who was scaling a 5,000 foot peak. At one point he lost his balance and began to fall. Desperately grabbing hold of the stump of a tree, he found himself hanging in mid-air. An avowed atheist, the man did not believe in prayer or liberation. But facing this harrowing situation, he looked toward the sky and called out, 'Is there anyone to save me?' To his utter surprise, a deep voice resounded from the sky, saying, 'My son, let go thy hold. I shall bear thee up.' There was a pause, and then the man again looked toward the sky and asked, 'Is there anyone else?'

(2) Are the descriptions of the hereafter true? If so, why do the accounts differ? Immortality in heaven is said to be of infinite duration, that is, not bound by time. But how can everlasting life be described in terms of time? Heavenly life has been described as enjoyment without suffering, youth without old age, pleasure without pain—an untenable claim from the point of view of reason. How can an embodied person be immortal? The gross, subtle, or spiritual body through which one experiences heavenly happiness cannot last forever. One wonders whether our individual desires create our ideas of heaven and whether our definition of heaven changes with the change of our desires. As Swami Vivekananda says:

Everyone's idea of pleasure is different. I have seen a man who is not happy unless he swallows a lump of opium every day. He may dream of a heaven where the land is made of opium. That would be a very bad heaven for me. Again and again in Arabian poetry we read of a heaven with beautiful gardens through which rivers run. I lived much of my life in a country where there is too much water; many villages are flooded and thousands of lives are sacrificed every year. So my heaven would not have gardens through which rivers flow; I would have a land where very little rain falls. Our pleasures are always changing.¹

(3) The claim that the soul is created at birth and has only one term of life is arbitrary and unjust. It is arbitrary because such an idea fails to explain the inequalities between one person and another in the physical, mental, moral, and spiritual spheres. To say that such inequalities are all due to environment and heredity is not an adequate explanation. To attribute such inequalities to the will of God only makes God cruel and whimsical. The claim is unjust because most people die with imperfections; therefore if there is only one term of life, it must follow that most are destined to suffer eternally in hell. How could the soul, God's own creation, be punished forever? Eternal punishment of the soul for the mistakes of a few years on earth goes against all sense of justice.

(4) Some traditions claim that theirs is the only way. Such a claim is possible only in a nonmoral universe created by an unjust God. Claims of exclusiveness have

1. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, chosen and with a biography by Swami Nikhilananda (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1984), p. 265.

prompted some traditions to increase the number of the faithful by forcible conversion and to exterminate the unfaithful.

In a recent article in *The New York Times*, the author Karen Armstrong writes:

Is acceptance of Jesus Christ necessary for salvation? That is the question threatening to split the Dutch Reformed Church in America, which has about 200,000 members. The Rev. Richard A. Rhem, pastor of Christ Community Church in Spring Lake, Mich., has said he no longer believes that Jesus is the only route to God. Through their own religions, he argues, Jews, Muslims and Buddhists can be admitted to heaven. His stance has shocked the regional Reformed Church authorities, who censured Mr. Rhem in July. But the pastor has been supported by his congregation as well as by some Christian churches in other denominations. Christians have been arguing about the salvation of unbelievers for at least 1,600 years. (Before that, the religion's struggle for survival overshadowed concerns about the fate of unbelievers.) But the debate has an urgency in the late 20th century because of our expanded understanding of other religions.... Christians like Mr. Rhem find it difficult to believe that a just and merciful God would damn millions of well-meaning men and women merely because they have not found faith in Jesus. Others insist that the Christian faith is an indispensable requirement for eternal beatitude.... In this century, the two tendencies have struggled against a backdrop of greater religious communication. Our new knowledge and new technology make the old isolation of the world's religions seem parochial and outdated. Christians are discovering that despite their obvious differences, the great world religions are in profound

agreement about essential spiritual issues. People are now beginning to seek inspiration from more than one religion.... In the 21st century, people of all faiths will have to decide whether to embrace the new globalization by expressing it in religious terms or to react vehemently against it and retreat into denominational ghettos.²

Claims of exclusiveness create suspicion. Spirituality is a universal phenomenon, not the exclusive possession of any particular faith. No religious tradition has a monopoly of Truth. Moral and ethical virtues of purity, compassion, truthfulness, and self-sacrifice—the means to liberation—are common to all traditions. All are children of one and the same God, to whom all return at the time of liberation. Prophets and saints of different religions are the messengers of that one God. Different religions are only the different paths to reach Him. Those who deny these facts deny God Himself.

An individual brought up today with a scientific outlook insists on the rule of law. In the classroom and the workplace he is encouraged to raise honest doubt and make critical enquiry about everything; thus he feels puzzled when he is asked to accept as infallible the teachings of a scripture or the tenets of a particular tradition. Two reasons are generally invoked in support of such infallibility: The teachings and tenets have been handed down from ancient times, and our ancestors believed in them. However, mere dogmatic assertion of the infallibility of a teaching about liberation cannot silence the doubts of modern man. Until Galileo stated otherwise, the world believed that the sun moved around the earth. If the laws of science work everywhere and at all times,

2. 'Whose Heaven Is It?', by Karen Armstrong, in *The New York Times*, 31 August 1996, p. 21.

should not the same laws apply to religion? Science has thrown open a window on the cosmos, which is now regarded as infinite. Our sun is a speck on the edge of a vast galaxy—one of innumerable galaxies—and the earth is a mere particle of dust circling that speck. The creation did not begin at a certain time on a particular day, but evolved over billions of years. The view of a universe with God at the top, the devil below, and the world of humans in between can be accepted by only the most naive.

Science demands deduction from facts, not from beliefs. In religion there is a tendency to create facts based upon preconceived conclusions. Too often reason has been used as a means of reinforcing religious prejudices. Scientific methods require us to accept a proposition only when it can be proven. Sceptics believe that the notion of liberation is nothing but wishful thinking on the part of visionaries who hope to fulfil their heart's desire for eternal life in defiance of the laws of science and reason.

THE VEDANTA VIEW OF LIBERATION

Regarding liberation, Vedanta maintains the following:

(1) Liberation that is verifiable is called *jivanmukti*, or freedom while living in the body. It is not going to another realm or attaining something new. It is realizing our true nature, which is ever pure and divine. Liberation is not freedom from anything, but freedom in the midst of everything. Liberation as happiness in heaven is only a halfway house. Vedanta asserts that liberation, in order to be believable, must be attained before death. One who dies in bondage will remain bound after death. Life's bondage created while living cannot be overcome by any readjustment after death. Vedanta views after-death experiences, whether enjoyment or suffering, as dreams and, like all dreams, they are heavily influ-

enced by the actions and thoughts of the waking state. The *Upanishad* says:

What is here, the same is there; and what is there the same is here. He goes from death to death who sees any difference here.³

Further, if it is accepted that liberation is possible only after death, then there would be none to teach the truth of liberation and demonstrate its reality.

(2) According to Vedanta, even the dwellers in the highest heaven are not liberated souls, since they are not absolutely free from embodiment and desires. Vedanta scriptures mention the different courses followed by souls after death:

First, the yogis who lead an extremely righteous life, meditate on Brahman, and follow the various disciplines of yoga, repair, after death, to *Brahmaloka* (roughly corresponding to the heaven of the Christians) and from there, in due course, attain salvation, known as *kramamukti*, or gradual emancipation. Second, the ritualists and the philanthropists, who cherish a desire for the fruit of their devotion and charity, repair, after death, to *Chandraloka*, or the lunar sphere. After enjoying there immense happiness as the fruit of their meritorious action, they come back to earth, since they still cherish desires for worldly happiness.... Third, those who perform actions forbidden by religion assume, after death, sub-human bodies and dwell in what is generally known as hell. After expiating their evil actions, they are reborn on earth. Fourth, the persons who perform

3. *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, tr. Swami Nikhilananda (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1990), *Katha Upanishad*, II.i.10, p. 165.

extremely vile actions spend many births as such insignificant beings as mosquitoes and fleas.

The relative value of a created being depends on the degree of consciousness manifested by it. The consciousness manifested by the dweller in *Brahmaloka* is very high, and the consciousness manifested by the insects is very low. The man endowed with Self-Knowledge attains liberation in this very life. His soul does not go to any sphere, for he has realized Its identity with the all-pervading Consciousness.⁴

According to Vedanta, these descriptions of heaven and hell and the courses followed after death are not literal, but symbolic and poetic. These are only visions that arise before the soul, which itself neither comes nor goes. Vedanta texts describe these spheres or planes and the various courses open to the soul after death in order to spur the seeker on to strive for liberation through Self-Knowledge.

(3) Vedanta's liberation is spiritual and depends upon Self-Knowledge. Shankaracharya asserts:

Let people quote the scriptures and sacrifice to the gods, let them perform rituals and worship the deities, but there is no liberation without the realization of one's identity with the Atman, no, not even in the lifetime of a hundred Brahmas put together [that is, an almost infinite length of time].⁵

Self-Knowledge is direct perception of one

all-pervading Self dwelling as the individual self in all beings. Direct perception is more than belief in scriptures, intellectual conviction, or emotional thrill. Believing in scriptures is believing in the belief of other persons. Intellectual conviction based on reasoning proves to be rationalization. Emotional thrills come and go and are never permanent. Direct perception is experiencing the Self by being one with It; it is seeing the Self with eyes closed in meditation as well as with eyes open in action. Such direct perception carries its own credentials: it transforms our consciousness forever, silences all doubt, is not antagonistic to reason and commonsense, and is conducive to the welfare of all beings.

(4) Liberation is universal and is the inevitable destiny of all living beings. Vedanta speaks of the three basic desires of all living beings: eternal life, limitless knowledge, and unbounded joy. We first seek to fulfil these desires through change of form and place. But nothing limited can give us the fulfilment of all three desires. At last we begin to change our thoughts and practise spiritual disciplines for self-purification. Eventually, our true self, which is the Self of the universe, becomes revealed in the mirror of our pure heart and we discover our real identity. In Biblical terms, liberation is the return of the prodigal son to his all-loving father. Consciously or unconsciously, all beings are striving for liberation. When the striving is unconscious we call it evolution of nature; when it is conscious we call it spiritual quest.

(5) The Self-Knowledge of Vedanta liberates not only the soul but also the mind. Self-Knowledge, by raising the blaze of spiritual consciousness, frees us from the bondage of highly personalized life and separative existence.

(6) Liberation through Self-Knowl-

4. *The Bhagavad Gita*, tr. Swami Nikhilananda (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1992), pp. 210–11.

5. *Vivekachudamani*, tr. Swami Madhavananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1970), verse 6, p. 3.

edge is not only cessation of sorrow and suffering but also bliss. Cessation of sorrow is not in itself happiness; happiness is something positive. Tasting the overpowering bliss of the Self, the liberated soul goes beyond all sorrow and suffering. The *Katha Upanishad* says:

There is one Supreme Ruler, the inmost Self of all beings, who makes His one form manifold. Eternal happiness belongs to the wise, who perceives Him within themselves—not to others. There is One who is the eternal Reality among non-eternal objects, the one [truly] conscious Entity among conscious objects, and who though non-dual, fulfils the desires of many. Eternal peace belongs to the wise who perceive Him within themselves—not to others.⁶

(7) Liberation through Self-Knowledge requires both human effort and divine grace. Making effort is necessary in order to recognize its limits. Ultimately we discover that even effort was possible because of grace. We strive for the Divine only when the Divine draws us toward It.

(8) Self-Knowledge alone can confer true liberation. Swami Vivekananda beautifully describes this liberation through Self-Knowledge:

One day a drop of water fell into the vast ocean. When it found itself there, it began to weep and complain just as you are doing. The great ocean laughed at the drop of water. 'Why do you weep?' it asked. 'I do not understand. When you join me, you join all your brothers and sisters, the other drops of water of which I am made. You become the ocean itself. If you wish to leave me, you have only to

rise up on a sunbeam into the clouds. From there you can descend again, a little drop of water, a blessing and a benediction to the thirsty earth.'

(9) One who is liberated while living is called a free soul. Only a free soul demonstrates the reality of God, the validity of the sacred texts, the divinity of the human soul, and the oneness of existence. He is also known as the Awakened One or the Illumined One. A free soul wears no outward mark. He neither traffics in miracles nor publicizes his holiness. As a fish swimming in water leaves no mark behind, or a bird flying in the air leaves no footprints, so a free soul moves in the world unnoticed by others. Ever aware of his identity with all beings, he feels through all hearts, walks with all feet, eats through all mouths, and thinks with all minds. He regards the pain and pleasure of others as his own pain and pleasure and his heart overflows with compassion for all.

While living in the body, the free soul may experience disease, old age, or decay; may feel hunger, thirst, or grief; but having realized that all these are the inevitable characteristics of the body, the mind or the senses, he is not overwhelmed by them. A person who sees a magic show on the stage does not consider it to be real, yet enjoys it thoroughly; likewise, a free soul looks upon the changing phenomena of the universe as the dynamic manifestation of the Divine.

In modern times, Sri Ramakrishna's life is a perfect example in this context. In April 1885, Sri Ramakrishna felt a soreness in his throat. Prolonged conversation and absorption in God-consciousness aggravated the pain. As simple treatment brought him no relief, a specialist was called for, and the

6. *The Upanishads*, vol. 1, *Katha Upanishad*, II.ii.12 and 13, pp. 175–76.

7. *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*, by his Eastern and Western Admirers (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1964), pp. 265–66.

illness was diagnosed as cancer. Although the doctor cautioned him against ecstasy and conversation, he could neither control his ecstasy nor turn away any sincere spiritual seeker. Despite his excruciating pain and emaciated physical condition, Sri Ramakrishna continued to minister to the spiritual needs of his disciples and devotees. As we read in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*:

Pandit Shashadhar [a renowned religious leader of the time] one day suggested to Sri Ramakrishna that the latter could remove the illness by concentrating his mind on the throat, the scripture having declared that yogis had power to cure themselves in that way. The Master rebuked the pandit:

'For a scholar like you to make such a proposal!' he said. 'How can I withdraw the mind from the Lotus Feet of God and turn it to this worthless cage of flesh and blood?' 'For our sake at least,' begged Narendra and the other disciples. 'But,' replied Sri Ramakrishna, 'do you think I enjoy this suffering? I wish to recover,

but that depends on the Mother.'

Narendra: 'Then please pray to Her. She must listen to you.'

Master: 'But I cannot pray for my body.'

Narendra: 'You must do it, for our sake at least.'

Master: 'Very well, I shall try.'

A few hours later the Master said to Narendra: 'I said to Her: "Mother, I cannot swallow food because of my pain. Make it possible for me to eat a little." She pointed you all out to me and said: "What? You are eating through all these mouths. Isn't that so?" I was ashamed and could not utter another word.'⁸

This is the liberation in life that Vedanta believes in, and this is the primary goal of all the works of service that are conducted by the Ramakrishna Mission. □

8. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, tr. Swami Nikhilananda (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1992), pp. 69-70.

Ideal Behind Ramakrishna Mission Activities

(Continued from page 391)

us—whether we are faithful to it, and whether the work is really a spiritual service and not merely a sort of social service. In our case, social activity comes as a by-product; the main thing is spiritual activity and we should aim to work out our salvation by means of these activities.

I need not deal at length with the ideas and ideals set before us by Sri Ramakrishna and, following him, Swamiji. Every year we discuss these aspects. We are mainly placing before you the report of the work that has been done. But the ideal behind that has to be remembered. The work we do has to be evaluated only by its spiritual content without which it has no meaning for an organi-

zation like ours which is out and out spiritual. I hope we shall be able to carry on our work with this ideal behind it. Then alone shall we be happy that we have deserved the blessings of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swamiji.

I conclude with my prayer to Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swamiji that their blessings may be always on us. May we remember that their principles are ever to be kept before us. With our loyalty to them we shall be able to fulfil the demands that are made on our Organization from the public and people in need. May we be able to carry on without budging from the ideal. □

An Unpublished Letter of Swami Vivekananda

This letter of Swami Vivekananda is undated. However, judging from its contents and from the other available letters of Swamiji it is likely that the letter was written between January and June 1895. Firstly, the Maharaja of Mysore passed away on 28 December 1894. Secondly, in a letter Swamiji wrote to Alasinga Perumal on 1 July 1895, there is a reference to a letter Swamiji had written to Sir Seshadri Iyer, the then Dewan of Mysore State.

Swami Prabhanandaji, a senior Trustee of the Ramakrishna Order, in his recent visit to Bangalore and Mysore had the privilege of becoming acquainted with Dr. Asoke, the great grandson of Sir Seshadri Iyer, in possession of this letter. With the help of one Mr. M.S. Nanjundiah, a xerox copy of the letter was obtained by the Swami. We are grateful to Swami Prabhanandaji for communicating this as yet unpublished letter to Prabuddha Bharata for the benefit of readers.

To
The Honourable Sir Seshadri Iyer,
K.C.S.I.

Dear Sir,

My sincerity will make up for my delay in conveying to you my heartfelt gratitude for all I owe to you.

It was indeed beyond the expression of any adequate language the fact of your befriending me and appreciating my work.

To the people of Southern India I owe much and not a small part of that to Mysore.

The untimely passing away of H.H. the Maharaja is a sad blow to all India and specially to the cause of religion.

A great future for the good of India was in the late Maharaja, guided by your excellency's noble heart & brain.

His work is done. Yours remain yet and every one knows that you are perfectly equal to this double work.

May Sankar keep you in health and may His blessings be on you and yours for ever & ever

is the sincerest prayer of

Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda's Ideal of Service of God in Man*

(A Historical Perspective)

SWAMI MUKHYANANDA

The author, an erudite scholar, and a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order with many publications to his credit, has presented in this lucid article, communicated by him for publication in the Prabuddha Bharata, many aspects of the spiritual life of the Indian people laying particular stress on the ideal of service of God in Man as propounded by Swami Vivekananda.

I

Spiritual ideals have been at the centre of Indian life and thought from the most ancient times. In Indian spiritual literature, man has been exhorted to realize the inherent divinity within oneself and in every being and attain Spiritual Freedom by overcoming the thralldom of the instincts and passions of the physical vesture in which his spiritual nature is encased. Various philosophies arose in India and laid down different paths for the purpose of the realization of the inner Divinity or Spirit (God/Atman) to suit the different types of aspirants according to their aptitude and ability (*Adhikāra*), depending on their being predominantly intellectual or emotional, active or quiet, and extrovert or introvert by nature. The technical spiritual methods or paths evolved for the realization of the unity of the divine or spiritual reality within oneself with the universal Divine Reality (*Īśvara* or Godhead) or

Supreme Spirit (Brahman) were called the Yogas, because they led to the Union (*Yoga*) of the individual with the Universal, like the rivers entering the sea, at different levels of manifestation of the Infinite many-faceted Divine Reality.

The Yogas, dependent on the type of human personality, have been considered mainly as four: (1) *Jñāna-yoga* (Path of Knowledge or Enquiry) for the intellectually inclined; (2) *Bhakti-yoga* (Path of Devotion) for those of emotional temperament; (3) *Karma-yoga* (Path of Work) for those who are extrovert and are of an active temperament; and (4) *Dhyāna-yoga* or *Rāja-yoga* (Path of Meditation and Psychic Control), for those of an introvert and quietistic temperament. There arose also many other subsidiary Yogic paths as auxiliaries to the main four paths, dependent on the permutation and combination of some aspects of the different main Yogas to suit the aspirants who were not ready for the final Goal.

The Vedic ideals which were positivistic, integral, and comprehensive always emphasized on a balance between the Temporal (*Ādhibhautika* or *Laukika*) and the Spiritual (*Ādhyātmika* or *Pāramārthika*) aspects of the total Reality, which is manifested on three levels—the Physical, Mental and Spiritual—since the personality of man is also

* This article appeared earlier in the Souvenir released on the occasion of Swami Vivekananda's Voyage for the World's Parliament of Religions by the Ramakrishna Yogodyana Math, Kankurgacchi. Printed with permission from Revered Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj, President of the Ramakrishna Yogodyana Math.

constituted of these three aspects, and he lives on all these three levels. Vedic thought considered that, though spiritual realization is the Highest Goal of human life, the *sum-mum bonum* (*Niḥśreyasa*), because man essentially is a Spirit, the other mundane aspects based on body and mind should not be neglected (*Na pramaditavyam*), for he has to realize the spiritual values in life. Both body and mind must be developed fully, but oriented to the progressive realization of the Highest Spiritual Reality. The skin should not be peeled off until the fruit within ripens.

They, therefore, conceived of four human aspirations or values in life (*Puruṣārthas*) to be realized, to lead man to the Highest Goal in gradual steps from where he is, making for his steady inner growth and development as he advances in his life from his childhood, from the physical through mental to the spiritual aspects of human personality. Of the four values, three were conducive to Secular Welfare (*Abhyudaya*) in the social context to fulfil the aspirations for: (1) acquiring prosperity (*Artha*), (2) obtaining satisfaction of legitimate physical, mental and aesthetic desires of man as a person (*Kāma*); and (3) development of moral, ethical, and other social virtues (*Dharma*) to lift up life to a higher level as human beings, this being a basis of orderly life for the acquirement of the first two values by all. The cultivation of *Dharma* in the proper manner is also a preparation for the fourth and Highest Value (*Niḥśreyasa*) of attaining Spiritual Freedom (*Mokṣa*). All the first three values which are to be attained in the social context, should be so oriented to lead man, as he goes on acquiring experience and becomes calm and mature, to the fulfilment of his highest aspiration of realizing his essential divine or spiritual nature, beyond all social and phenomenal existence, which is one with *Sat-Cit-Ānanda* Brahman.

As long as both the *Abhyudaya* and *Niḥśreyasa* aspects were harmonized in the lives of men and women in society, both the

social and spiritual life developed fruitfully and smoothly, everyone in different stages of development and with different aptitudes and abilities finding his or her appropriate place in it. There was great efflorescence of cultural and spiritual ideals in a plethora of expressions. But at some time in Indian spiritual history, imbalance begins to show up due to preoccupation with the spiritual aspect, perhaps in a superficial way more concerned with rites and rituals, etc., to the detriment of the physical and the mental aspects. As a result there seems to have been decline in both the social and the spiritual aspects of life as they are interdependent, supporting and reinforcing each other. We find an echo of this in the *Īśāvāśya Upaniṣad*, which warns against such an imbalance and advocates a suitable integration of both secular and spiritual ideals. It says:

Those who are devoted only to Secular Knowledge (*Avidyā*) enter into blinding darkness; into darkness greater than that, as it were, do those enter, who delight in Spiritual Knowledge (*Vidyā*) alone.

One type of result, they say, is obtained by *Vidyā*, and quite another by *Avidyā*. Thus have we heard from the wise who explained it to us.

He who understands *Vidyā* and *Avidyā*, both together, (and puts them into practice) attains Immortality (*Amṛtam*) through *Vidyā*, having conquered death-like existence through *Avidyā*.

—*Īśa Upaniṣad*, verses 9–11.

This Upanishad recommends at the very start the necessary performance of all social activities, but in a spirit of dedication and detachment, giving up all covetousness, seeing the Divine Spirit (*Īśa* or *Īśvara*), as the very name of the Upanishad signifies, everywhere and in all things and beings, to lead man to the Highest Goal. 'What delu-

sion, what sorrow is there for the wise man who sees the unity of all existence and perceives all beings as his own Self?' (verse 7). In this Upanishad we find the beginnings of Karma-yoga clearly.

But this advice was not fully heeded for long, or was forgotten in due course with the heterogenous growth of society over a wider area, and Sri Krishna re-emphasized it in the *Bhagavad Gītā* in a more comprehensive manner, applying the principles of Karma-yoga both to the individual and social contexts with a psycho-philosophical background.¹

However, with the passage of time and the coming into prominence of Buddhism, the spiritual and the monastic ideal was exclusively emphasized and widely propagated in India and abroad. All sorts of people flocked to it, irrespective of their aptitude and ability, and as a result gradually there was all-round degeneration. Social and political weaknesses set in and moral corruption became rampant. The integral vision of the Vedic Seers was lost, and there appeared to be chaos everywhere.

Out of this chaos, the Vedic ideals began to emerge again slowly some time before the beginning of the Christian Era. And at this juncture arose the great Śaṅkarācārya who revitalized the Vedic ideals of two-fold development and established the Advaita standpoint of the Upanishads or Vedanta that the whole universe is a manifestation of the Divine Reality Brahman (*Brahmaiva viśvam idaṁ variṣṭham*) and that the souls (*Jīvas*) are in their real nature Brahman manifesting in the embodied beings (*Jīvo brahmaiva na aparah*). In the introduction to his commentary on the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Ācārya Śaṅkara defined two-fold Vedic Dharma in these memorable words:

1. In the Pañca Mahā Yajñas enjoined by the Dharma-Śāstras there was prescription of service to mankind and lower creatures in a spirit of sacrifice and worship.

The Vedic Dharma is two-fold, of the nature of advancement into the world of action (*Pravṛtti Lakṣaṇa*) and withdrawal or turning round into the world of the Spirit (*Nivṛtti Lakṣaṇa*), both of which are necessary means and complementary counterparts to the maintenance of the world, leading directly to the attainment of Secular Welfare (*Abhyudaya*) and Spiritual Fulfilment (*Niḥśreyasa*) of all beings (*Prāṇināṁ sākṣāt abhyudaya niḥśreyasa hetuḥ*).

But before Śri Śaṅkara's teachings could take firm roots and his work of cleansing up the accretions of the earlier times could fully bear fruit, foreign invaders established their rule over parts of the country and imposed their alien parochial socio-religious ideas and ideals of an altogether different nature. From about the 13th century AD, there was disruption in the national life-current and all-round confusion in Socio-Spiritual values. Due to want of circulation of the Vedantic ideals, all sorts of degenerating and weakening ideas and ideals grew everywhere. The great national spiritual ideals were forgotten or completely distorted. Inertia (*Tamas*) arising from helplessness was equated with spirituality, and all sorts of external rites and rituals and local customs took the place of religion.

II

After about five centuries of this chaotic condition, from the 19th century, the true Vedic spirit began to re-emerge slowly when India became acquainted with the western scientific and rational spirit and contact was established with the outside world under the British rule. Raja Rammo-han Roy, Swami Dayananda, and other stalwarts started the revival of the Upanishadic and Vedic ideals. Then came Sri Ramakrishna in whom the ancient Advaita Vedantic spiritual ideals reincarnated in full splendour in all their aspects, and he trained

Swami Vivekananda and his other disciples to work out the practical aspects of the Advaita Vedanta, which established the divinity of the universe and of all its living beings. The One Infinite *Sat-Cit-Ānanda* Brahman is manifesting as the *Jagat* (Universe) from Its *Sat* (Existence) aspect, *Jivas* from Its *Cit* (Knowledge or Consciousness) aspect, and *Īśvara* (Godhead) from Its *Ānanda* (Bliss) aspect, and yet remains as the substratum of this Triad, like the ocean of all its waves etc. Thus it establishes the Oneness or Non-Duality (*Advaita*) of all Existential Reality and Its spiritual nature. The One and the Many are the same Spiritual Reality manifested in different ways at different levels, like H₂O manifesting as ice, water, vapour, mist, frost, snow, etc. And each Soul or *Jiva*, therefore, is potentially divine. Hence Sri Ramakrishna had commended in an exalted mood the ideal of *Śiva-jñāne Jīva-Sevā*—Service of the *Jivas* manifested in all living beings, considering them as the manifestation of *Śiva* or the Supreme Divine Reality.

Basing on this Advaitic realization, Swami Vivekananda taught his practical Vedanta of 'Service of God in Man' in the wide world. Of course, service to the *Jivas* includes all the other living creatures as well though it is primarily directed to man, because divinity is expressed more there, and it is man who is to be taught to serve all other creatures, which the Vedic, Jaina and Buddhist scriptures also teach (See footnote 1, previous page). The idea is implied that other lower creatures are not to be neglected. If man is transformed, naturally, his love and service will flow towards other creatures as well. Service must be rendered according to the needs of the person or persons—physical, mental, or spiritual—in a spirit of worship of God, so that it will purify the egoistic human nature and lead to God-realization or Self-realization, according to the stage of development of the aspirant, which will conduce to Spiritual Freedom or *Mukti*.

Swami Vivekananda, therefore, has defined Religion in these famous words:

Each Soul is potentially divine. The Goal is to manifest this Divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by Work (*Karma-yoga*), or Worship (*Bhakti-yoga*), or Psychic Control (*Dhyāna-yoga* or *Rāja-yoga*), or Philosophy (*Jñāna-yoga*)—by one or more or all of these—and be FREE. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details.

Thus, though Vivekananda recognizes the role of all the four Yogas of Work, Worship, Psychic Control, and Philosophy for the attainment of Spiritual Freedom, he has preferred the integration of all these aspects in different measures according to the nature of the practising aspirant, for a fuller development of all the faculties of one's personality and the realization of the different aspects of the Divine Reality through them. He has emphasized on this integration many times and has also designed the Monogram to signify it.

However, in the present situation of the country and the world, where millions and millions are suffering in poverty and hunger, and moral turpitude has overtaken the world, he has advocated making *Karma-yoga* the primary basis for the integration of all other Yogas. The 'Belly-God' must receive the first *pūjā* or worship. No other worship is possible on an empty stomach. '*Śarīram ādhyam khalu dharma-sāadhanam*, A healthy mind in a healthy body is the primary basis of all other spiritual effort,' declare the Vedic scriptures. Swami Vivekananda enlarged the scope of the *Karma-yoga* taught in the *Īśa Upaniṣad* and the *Gītā*, lifting it up from its individual and social context to cover the whole of life, to be put into practice in every field of human activity. This he did in terms of Sri Ramakrishna's realizations and teach-

ings and being confirmed by his own experiences and realization of the Advaitic ideal of the Oneness of humanity and all beings in the Divine Reality. *The One and the Many are the same Reality*. Swami Vivekananda has thus continued the ancient ideals with amplification to meet the necessities of the modern situation in the world. As the Bible says, all Prophets come to fulfil and not to destroy.

Vivekananda has also upheld the integrative and complementary ancient ideals of *Abhyudaya* and *Nihsreyasa*, modifying them in the modern context, in the light of the new orientation of the old ideals before mankind in the motto: '*Ātmano mokṣārthaṃ, jagat hitāya ca*, Attainment of one's own Spiritual Freedom (*Mokṣa*), through the welfare of the world'.

Vivekananda exhorts people to serve the God in Man again and again in his speeches and writings, besides setting an example by his own illustrious life and work. For this very purpose he established the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in his Guru's name from whom he imbibed these ideals. In this short article it is not possible to refer to all the numerous passages in regard to Swami Vivekananda's Ideal of Service of God in Man, which are expressed by him in various ways in different practical and philosophical contexts. We shall quote here only a few which are illustrative and not exhaustive:

1. When he visited Rameswaram in 1897 after his return from the West, he gave a short speech in which he pointed out:

This is the gist of all worship—to be pure and to do good to others. He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased, really worships Shiva; and if he sees Shiva only in the image, his worship is but preliminary. He who has served and helped one poor man seeing Shiva in him, without thinking of his caste, or creed, or race, or anything, with

him Shiva is more pleased than with the man who sees Him only in temples.²

2. When he went to Madras from Rameswaram, in his lecture there in February 1897 on 'The Future of India', he exhorted the people:

Let all other vain gods disappear for the time from our minds. This is the only god that is awake, our own race—'everywhere his hands, everywhere his feet, everywhere his ears, he covers everything.' All other gods are sleeping. What vain gods shall we go after and yet cannot worship the god that we see all round us, the Virat? When we have worshipped this, we shall be able to worship all the other gods.³

3. In his Poem addressed 'To a Friend' (in Bengali), he reveals:

Listen, friend, I will speak my heart to thee;
I have found in my life this truth supreme—
Buffeted by waves, in this whirl of life,
There's one ferry that takes across the sea.

Formulas of worship, control of breath,
Science, philosophy, systems varied,
Relinquishment, possession, and the like,
All these are but delusions of the mind—
Love, Love—that's the one thing,
the sole treasure.

In Jiva and Brahman, in man and God,
In ghosts, and wraiths, and spirits,
and so forth,
In Devas, beasts, birds, insects,
and in worms,
This PREMA (LOVE) dwells in the heart
of them all.

2. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 3, pp. 141–2. [Hereafter CW].

3. CW, vol. 3, pp. 300–301.

.....

From highest Brahman to the yonder worm,
And to the very minutest atom,
Everywhere is the same God, the All-Love;
Friend, offer mind, soul, body, at their feet.

These are His manifold forms before thee,
Rejecting them, where seekest thou for God?
Who loves all beings without distinction,
He indeed is worshipping best his God.⁴

4. In a letter to Alasinga Perumal from Chicago in 1894, his anguished heart cries out:

Him I call a Mahatman (great soul) whose heart bleeds for the poor, otherwise he is a Duratman (wicked soul)... My heart is too full to express my feeling; you know it, you can imagine it. So long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold every man a traitor who, having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them!⁵

In his letter to Miss Mary Hale from Almora on 9 July 1897, his amazing intensity of feeling for the good of humanity is revealed:

I must see my machine in strong working order, and then knowing sure that I have put in a lever for the good of humanity, in India at least, which no power can drive back, I will sleep, without caring what will be next; and may I be born again and again, and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls—and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species, is the special object of my worship.⁶

4. CW, vol. 4, pp. 495–6.

5. CW, vol. 5, p. 58.

6. CW, vol. 5, pp. 136–7.

We shall conclude this brief paper with the famous quotation and significant words of Sister Nivedita in regard to Swami Vivekananda's ideal of *Karma-yoga* as service of God in Man, from her Introduction to *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*:

It is this which adds its crowning significance to our Master's life, for there he becomes the meeting-point, not only of East and West, but also of past and future. If the MANY and the ONE be indeed the same Reality, then it is not all modes of worship alone, but equally all modes of struggle, all modes of creation, which are paths of realization. No distinction, henceforth between sacred and secular. To labour is to pray. To conquer is to renounce. Life is itself religion. To have and to hold is as stern a trust as to quit and to avoid.

This is the realization which makes Vivekananda the great preacher of *Karma*, not as divorced from, but as expressing *Jñāna* and *Bhakti*. To him, the worship, the study, the farmyard, and the field are as true and fit scenes for the meeting of God with man as the cell of the monk or the door of the temple. To him, there is no difference between service of man and worship of God, between manliness and faith, between true righteousness and spirituality.⁷ □

7. CW, vol. 1, Introduction, pp. xv-xvi.

No man who has not true love towards God can be religious. Religion begins when attraction towards God is greater than attraction towards the world. The attraction towards the world means egotism; attraction towards God means self-surrender.

—Swami Ramakrishnananda

Swami Vimalananda

SWAMI MUKTINATHANANDA

A monk of the Ramakrishna Order, Swami Muktinathananda, presents the inspiring life of Swami Vimalananda, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda. One of those rare souls who were ignited to lead a spiritual life with the lofty aim, 'Ātmano mokṣārtham jagaddhitāya ca', Swami Vimalananda remains as a bright example of a monk who, though tuned to the highest, cared, despite his own poor health, for the suffering humanity seeing in them the presence of the divine. Remarkable also is the sense of brotherhood that made him feel keenly the sufferings of his brother-disciples and rush to be by their side even when he himself was not in good health. Swami Vimalananda said, 'A man's real worth is estimated by the amount of faith he has in the Supersensuous Existence for it always determines and gives shape to the nature of every work he does, every thought he thinks, and every move he makes.' Swami Vimalananda proved by his actions that he was indeed a man of great faith and a worthy disciple of his master.

'If I cannot do anything for the Ramakrishna Mission, if I cannot adequately serve the Mission, why should I take advantage of being one of its members? I have no right to do so. I am only contracting a moral debt by taking advantage of membership and yet not serving the Mission in any way.' These fiery words are extracts from a letter of Swami Vimalananda dated 14 December 1906 written from Castle Kernan, a large house in Triplicane, Madras, where he had been forced to take rest owing to prolonged illness.

This illustrious disciple of Swami Vivekananda wrote further in the same letter, 'Why should I bring discredit upon the Mission, upon the Master Swami Vivekananda himself, by my own faults and weaknesses? I heard from the lips of the Master—Oh, I still see before my eyes his figure burning with fiery enthusiasm and his heart melting with compassion—that he would work himself to death, and we too, his disciples, following in his footsteps, should do the same. "I will die, you will die, and then the Mother will rise." To live for the sake of our own growth and for the good of others is the only qualification for becom-

ing a true disciple of Swamiji and a member of the Mission. I know I fall short of this. One should become a disciple in order to give and not to take. But what am I doing? I am only taking....'¹

A study of the life of this great personality reveals how humbly he offered his entire life to the service of his Master, yet apprehending all the while that this dedication might not be total.

Swami Vimalananda, known in his premonastic life as Khagendra Nath Chatterjee, was born in the year 1872. He was the second son of Sri Beni Madhab Chatterjee who lived at first in Baganda, a village belonging to Jagat Ballavpur P.S. within Howrah District of West Bengal. Later on he moved to Andul, also in Howrah District. Primarily, Beni Madhav was the State Engineer of Sri Govind Lal Roy, the Raja of Rangpur (now in Bangladesh). He was later promoted to the post of the manager of the entire estate of the Raja owing to his efficiency and noble character. For the sake of his work he bought a house at the Cathedral

1. 'An Epistle of Swami Vimalananda', *Vedanta Kesari*, vol. 23, no. 10, pp. 385–6.

Mission Lane in Calcutta, and used to stay there occasionally with his family. He was renowned for his piety and strict adherence to spiritual practices. If on any day due to unusually heavy pressure of work he could not perform his religious rites at the appointed hours, he would fast the whole day; on returning home at night he would first complete his religious observances and then only partake of some food or drink. His wife too was equally devout and spiritual. Besides, she was as beautiful as a goddess. Her sole concern was to bring up her children along the path of righteousness and devotion. It was thus natural that children like Khagendranath with latent spiritual tendencies were born to these noble parents.

Beni Madhav Chatterjee had several sons and daughters. Notwithstanding his many virtues, he used to suffer terribly because of chronic dyspepsia. Unfortunately, his children inherited this disease from him and possessed weak health. Two of his children became victims of tuberculosis and died prematurely. One of his daughters and sons-in-law also died all on a sudden. Thus, the pious Brahmin family suffered severely due to bereavements of near and dear ones. Nevertheless, like true devotees of God, the family withstood all these shocks with great patience and poise, firmly convinced that God alone is real in this transitory world.

Khagendranath was loved by all from his childhood on account of his sharp intellect, extreme simplicity and pleasing personality. He was the centre of attraction amongst his friends. He became the leader of a group of like-minded youths, five of whom² later renounced the world and became sannyasin disciples of Swami Vivekananda and several others led exalted lives as lay devotees. One of his classmates said of him:

'Khagendra was devoted to God ever since his childhood. He used to spend his days in religious discourses with monks of different denominations. He tried his best to help his friends to proceed along the path of religion. By means of his sympathy, love and good counsel, he was able to motivate many boys and young men to lead virtuous lives. Many bear testimony that without his company or advice they would have gone astray.'³

Swami Virajananda who was also his class-mate has presented the following reminiscence regarding him:

I met Khagendra for the first time in 1890 when we were studying in the Matriculation class in Ripon College.... Our first acquaintance gradually developed into deep friendship. Within a short time my parents started looking upon him as their own son, and I too used to be considered likewise in his family. A few of our class-mates also became intimate with us around this time. The spiritual fervour of Khagendra was first transmitted to me and then to the others also. Everyday after the college hours, we used to assemble and discuss various religious topics until late at night. The sole desire of everyone of our group was to attain God-realization. During this period we were all especially attracted to Khagen because of his love, intelligence and advice. Of course, in those days we hardly had any clear conception about religion, but we used to practise whatever little we knew....

A few months later we got a small booklet entitled 'Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa' compiled by Sri Suresh Chandra Dutta. Just a few days after this, we learned from a notice displayed in the street that there would be a

2. They were Swamis Shuddhananda, Virajananda, Atmananda, Bodhananda, and Prakashananda.

3. Swami Saradananda, 'Swami Vimalananda', *Udbodhan*, Bhadra 1315 (Bengali Sakha), p. 462.

festival in connection with Sri Ramakrishna in the Yogodyana at Kankurgachhi. Our joy knew no bounds when we attended the function on the scheduled day. Thereafter we used to visit Kankurgachhi quite often and hear many things about Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples.

Around this time, Khagen [short for Khagendranath] and myself decided to renounce the world and lead a contemplative life somewhere in the Himalayas. As we had the wherewithal to go to Darjeeling, we decided to go thither. It was settled that we should start on the journey the next day. But unexpectedly, someone whom Khagen trusted very much forbade us to leave, saying that he had seen some bad omen during the previous night which indicated that we would encounter great suffering if we went to Darjeeling. So we abandoned the idea of going to the Himalayas on that occasion.

However, our spiritual practices and studies in the Ripon College were going on hand in hand. We passed the Matriculation examination in the year 1890. As far as I remember, Khagen was awarded a scholarship of Rs. 15 per month. We all started our F.A. course in the Ripon College itself. Revered Sri Mahendra Nath Gupta ('M') used to teach us at that time. He won great popularity among the students owing to his many good qualities. Words cannot express how greatly we benefited from our acquaintance with him. Gradually we learnt that Mahendra Babu was a holy man. We started frequenting his house with the intention of having religious discussions. One day while we were there, he indicated during the course of conversation the necessity of giving up everything for the sake of God-realization. He added, 'If you want to see living examples of what I say, then one day go and visit the Baranagore

Monastery where the sannyasin disciples of Sri Ramakrishna are staying.'

After a couple of days while we were talking among ourselves in the college, we recalled the above-mentioned statement of Mahendra Babu and at once set out for Baranagore Monastery on foot. We had heard from Mahendra Babu that Sri Ramakrishna used to advise his devotees not to visit a monk empty-handed; rather they should offer some food or a fruit or at least a twig. Therefore, we purchased something worth a pice or two which was all the money we had with us. When we reached the monastery, the monks received us with great cordiality and affection. On seeing and conversing with them we understood that they had realized what we had been cherishing at heart. Thereafter we continued to visit the monastery whenever we found any leisure, and eagerly looked forward to have the opportunity to renounce the world and join the monastery.

Since meeting the sannyasin disciples of Sri Ramakrishna at the Math, Khagendra felt that he had found the way to that cherished goal which he had been seeking so far in various places. He also saw that the goal could not be attained without renouncing the world. Most probably our first visit to the monastery took place prior to our passing the F.A. examination in 1892. In those days, Khagendra used to keep long hair which would fall over his neck and all around his face, and he appeared very handsome. This beauty was matched by his polite behaviour. Just by seeing him, holy thoughts and love used to well up in our minds. Even at that age, by means of good counsel and noble examples, he was able to bring many young men as well as elderly people to the right path. On several occasions he had to face various temptations; but each time he emerged victorious by

dint of his noble character.

Towards the end of 1891 or the beginning of 1892, Khagendra together with his friend Sushil visited Jayrambati and had the privilege of meeting the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi. Either during this visit or on some other occasion, the Holy Mother blessed him by giving initiation.

When Khagen was preparing for his B.A. examination in 1895, his health broke down and he had to give up his studies. Thereafter he stayed at home for some time and tried to recoup his health.⁴

When Khagen was thus spending his days, he kept himself informed of the achievements of Swamiji who was then lecturing in the West. As the time of his return to India drew close, Khagen became more and more eager to see him in person. Finally, when Swamiji reached Calcutta in February 1897, Khagen was present at the Sealdah Railway Station to receive him. Together with his friends he drew Swamiji's carriage upto the Ripon College where Swamiji addressed the assembled crowd for a few minutes. In the afternoon Khagen again met Swamiji. About this meeting Swami Shuddhananda later wrote:

After my noonday meal, I went to the house of Khagen (later Swami Vimalananda) and from there drove together in their cab to the house of Pashupati Babu. Swamiji was at that time resting in a room upstairs.... Swami Shivananda took us to the presence of Swamiji and introduced us to him with the words: 'These young men are your ardent admirers.' ... Looking at Khagen and seeing his emaciated appearance, Swamiji said, 'This boy looks very sickly.' Swami Shivananda told: 'He has been suffering from dyspepsia for a long time.' Swamiji responded, 'Are not our people of Bengal

sentimental? That is why there are so many cases of dyspepsia here.' After a while we made obeisance to Swamiji and departed to our homes.⁵

Khagen was charmed by the magnetic personality of Swamiji. He has related his experience of this day as follows:

My idea of religion was then confined to purity and meditation. Sitting at the feet of the holy and great disciples of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, I had learnt that these two were the indispensable conditions of acquiring spirituality and were the sure marks by which a religious man can always be known. My debt of gratitude to the blessed Swamis, at whose feet I had learnt these great lessons, is too large to be repaid. Personal contact with Swamiji instead of diminishing the value of purity and meditation in my eyes, has only enhanced it. At the same time it has heightened and intensified my conception of religion by adding new elements to it.... The first sight of Swamiji, the peculiar brightness on his face, his lustrous yet soft and sweet eyes, at once carried into my heart an overwhelming sense of satisfaction that I had come to a man the like of whom I had never seen before. And when he began to talk to us making personal inquiries and giving us words of hope and encouragement with the cordiality of one truly interested in our welfare, we felt that our hearts were being drawn closer to him. To us who were very insignificant compared with his friends and visitors who were standing or sitting around him in large numbers, this kindness on his part filled us with great joy and gratitude. Then the wonderfully free and frank way in which he was talking to his visitors

4. Ibid., pp. 462-5.

5. His Eastern and Western Admirers, *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983), p. 318. [Hereafter *Reminiscences*.]

revealed to us a heart that knew nothing of guile or fear nor cared a bit for social conventionality. The transparently clear and pointed words that were coming out of his lips like shooting stars gave us a peep into the power of penetration of his intellect and the breadth and profundity of his mental vision. We felt ourselves in the presence of an overpowering personality whose immensity it was not possible for us to gauge, but which was drawing us to itself as by a tie of close personal relationship.⁶

Khagendra was so much attracted towards Swamiji that whenever Swamiji went to deliver lectures or discourses, Khagendra would be invariably present there. The desire to embrace the monastic life grew stronger in him and, finally, in the middle of 1897, Khagendra renounced the world and joined the Alambazar Math with the consent of his parents.

In those days Swami Turiyananda used to take classes on the Upanishads and other scriptures at the Alambazar Math as per the instructions of Swamiji. Vimalananda started attending the classes. He also engaged himself in regular spiritual practices and various forms of service to his brother monastics. In the beginning of 1899 Swamiji established the Belur Math at its permanent site. Vimalananda spent some of his memorable days there in the company of his Guru.

After a few months, the Advaita Ashrama was established at Mayavati in the lap of the Himalayas and the *Prabuddha Bharata*, a monthly journal in English, started in Madras in 1896, later began to be published first from Almora and then from Mayavati. Finding the paucity of monastic workers at Mayavati, Swamiji selected Vimalananda to be posted there along with Swamis Virajananda and Satchidananda (Senior). It may be mentioned here that Swamiji used to praise Vimalananda's ex-

cellent command over the English language. Captain Sevier was then the manager of Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati while Swami Swarupananda was the editor of the *Prabuddha Bharata*. To begin with, Vimalananda was to assist Capt. Sevier. Later, he became the manager of the Advaita Ashrama as well as the assistant editor of the journal.

Though Vimalananda had poor health, he never knew idleness or despondency. No one ever saw him wasting time in useless talks. Belur or Mayavati, wherever he might be, he would always keep himself engaged in meditation, japa, reading of the scriptures and other intellectual pursuits, besides cooking, nursing and many other such works involving physical labour. He would continue this even when he was indisposed. He had a special sympathy for patients, and whenever any inmate of the monastery fell sick, he would invariably nurse him with utmost care. If he found anyone in the monastery doing excessive work because of shortage of hands, he would immediately come to his rescue notwithstanding his own weak physique. Many times he had to suffer due to this trait.

Vimalananda's health improved substantially during the first two years of his stay in Mayavati. He came to Calcutta in 1900 on some errand. His friends and monastic brothers who saw him this time felt happy that at last Vimalananda had improved his health, which improvement they hoped would persist for a long time. Vimalananda returned to Mayavati after a few days.

The year 1901 was memorable for Vimalananda since Swamiji visited Mayavati in the month of January that year. Receiving the news of the sudden demise of Captain Sevier, Swamiji came to Mayavati on 3 January and stayed there for a couple of weeks mainly to console Mrs. Sevier. Though the period of stay was short, Vimalananda had the rare privilege of serving his Guru on the lap of the sacred Himalayas.

6. *Reminiscences* pp. 308–09.

On the 18th of January, Swamiji left Mayavati, and Vimalananda bade him goodbye perhaps not knowing that he would see him no more, for Swamiji left his mortal coil just after a year and a half.

During Swamiji's stay in Mayavati, however, a very interesting incident took place which had a far-reaching effect on the life of Vimalananda. One morning Swamiji suddenly visited the room which had been set apart as a shrine in the Advaita Ashrama at the earnest desire of Vimalananda, Virajananda and several other inmates. Swamiji was surprised to find that regular worship of Sri Ramakrishna was going on in that room with flowers, incense sticks and other offerings. Since it was contrary to the ideal for which the Advaita Ashrama had been established, Swamiji felt very much upset. But he did not order them to discontinue the worship forthwith, for he knew that it would hurt their feelings. Rather, Swamiji wanted that his disciples should be able to see their own mistakes and rectify them. Though he said nothing to them at that time, he expressed his strong disapproval of any kind of ritualistic worship in an Advaita Ashrama. Consequently, the worship was discontinued and the shrine was ultimately closed from 18 March 1902. Vimalananda, however, doubted whether it was proper for him to remain as a member of the Advaita Ashrama when he leaned towards dualism. Being unable to resolve the dilemma, he wrote the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, seeking her guidance. She gave her counsel in a historic letter written from Jayrambati in September 1902, 'One who is our Guru (Sri Ramakrishna), is Advaita. Since you all are his disciples, you too are Advaitins. I can emphatically say, you are surely Advaitavadins.' Feeling extremely concerned about the spiritual well-being of her beloved sons, she added, 'Convey my love and blessings to Mrs. Sevier. Let all of you accept my blessings.... It is a woman's Math; stay carefully in the Math. Swamiji's support is no

more.'⁷

Vimalananda together with his brother-disciple Swarupananda came down from the Himalayas in the winter of 1901 and stayed for a few days in Allahabad for preaching work. Here he delivered two lectures in English on Vedanta. Most probably, these were his first public lectures. Nevertheless, his maiden speech as well as his subsequent discourses on Vedanta and allied topics kept his audience spellbound. In fact, his erudite presentation and saintly behaviour created such a deep impression on the minds of the local public that there was a growing demand to start a Ramakrishna Mission centre in Allahabad for continuance of his preaching work on a more permanent basis. Unfortunately, however, his health broke down at Allahabad and he returned to Mayavati by the end of winter.

Vimalananda's health showed no sign of improvement at Mayavati, rather it was becoming worse day by day. Finally, in deference to the advice of specialists, he decided to hand over his duties to others and leave Mayavati. Vimalananda was a trustee of Advaita Ashrama and he left Mayavati for Belur Math in 1903. From Belur Math he proceeded to Waltair (Visakhapatnam). With a view to recouping his health in the bracing climate of the sea-coast, he spent a few days in Waltair and then went to Madras. At Madras he was happy in mind on account of the loving care and holy company of Swami Ramakrishnanandaji Maharaj. Though there was no significant improvement in his health, he continued to take rest in Madras for a few months more.

Swami Atmananda (Shukul Maharaj) was then the Head of the newly established Bangalore branch of the Mission. On hearing that Swami Atmananda was feeling exhausted due to overwork, Vimalananda

7. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1981), vol. 2, p. 572.

rushed to Bangalore to help his dear brother-disciple, notwithstanding his own failing health. Vimalananda not only assisted Atmananda in every possible way, but also conducted scriptural classes and held religious discourses at different places in the city. As a result, Atmananda regained his health, but Vimalananda became too weak to continue his work at Bangalore. He had, therefore, no other option but to come back to Madras on health grounds. Fortunately, due to strict diet and constant supervision of the attending physicians, he regained his health quite appreciably during this spell of his stay in Madras. It was while staying in Madras that he heard the shocking news that one of his beloved brother-disciples, Swami Swarupananda, had passed away in Nainital at the tender age of thirty-five. This tragic news came to him as a bolt from the blue. Though he became very much perturbed, he regained his poise within a short time and decided to return to Belur Math.

It was 1906. Everyone at Belur Math felt happy to see Vimalananda coming back with improved health, though none could perhaps imagine that it was his last visit to the Math. In the meantime, requests started pouring in from the Vedanta Centres of New York and San Francisco to send Swami Vimalananda there as a preacher. But Vimalananda expressed his inability to go because he felt that his present health condition would not permit him to undertake such an arduous task. Nevertheless, he continued to participate in the various activities of the Math and his health also remained tolerably well. During the winter of 1906, Mother Sevier visited the Math and seeing Vimalananda in good health, expressed great satisfaction. Vimalananda decided to go back to Mayavati along with her. Before his departure he gave religious discourses in a few places. His lecture in English delivered at Behala Hitakari Sabha won great acclaim. He also participated in the celebration of the birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna at

Andul—his home town—along with many monks of Belur Math. He felt very happy to meet his parents at home.

Vimalananda returned to Mayavati accompanied by Mrs. Sevier in the month of April 1907. Swami Virajananda was then the President of Advaita Ashrama. Great efforts were being made at that time to bring out a definitive edition of the complete works of Swami Vivekananda. Vimalananda at once dedicated his heart and soul to the fulfilment of this sacred and important task. The *Brahmavadin* gives a graphic description of Vimalananda's condition during this period:

He found much refreshment for soul, as well as for body, among the solitude of the Himalayas, and the grandeur and sublimity of the snows served as a bracing tonic to him. No longer could he be prevented from plunging himself again into intellectual work, which was always marked in his case by a subtleness of comprehension combined with an emotional, easy-flowing, happy expression of high ideals and thoughts.⁸

Unfortunately, the strain was too much for his feeble health which broke down completely within a very short time. This work was, as it were, the last oblation to the sacrificial fire lit in his heart by his Guru.

From his childhood he had been a sufferer, but he felt that suffering might be a factor in the victory of the will in its struggle for emancipation from the tyranny of circumstances. He realized fully well that his pure Self had no connection with the body, and that his lifelong suffering engendered by the changes of the physical body was but a passing phase foreign to the Atman. He combined a gentleness and conciliatoriness of manner with high character and noble aims, and an earnest and genuine anxiety to

8. 'In Memoriam: Swami Vimalananda', *The Brahmavadin*, vol. 13, no. 9, pp. 450-1.

make good use of his knowledge of the Vedanta, which he desired should subserve some really useful end.⁹

Vimalananda had hardly spent six months in Mayavati when he started having rise of temperature from the month of October 1907. Though the fever subsided after a month, the attending physician advised him not to take up any intellectual work at least for two years. Accordingly, he engaged himself in gardening and similar other activities of the Ashrama to give his mind some amount of rest. However, as soon as he regained some strength, he could not check himself and resumed his usual study and writing work without thinking of the mental strain it caused. Whenever he was cautioned by his brother monks not to do so much work, he would politely say, 'As it is certain that my health will not come round, why should I not help you as much as possible? I will definitely get mental satisfaction and bliss by so doing. Why do you then stand in the way?' On hearing this, everybody felt sad at heart, and could not help admiring his utmost dedication and uncompromising spirit of sacrifice.

Vimalananda again became sick in February 1908 and this time his fever showed no sign of remission. Gradually, it became clear to all that he was suffering from the fatal tuberculosis. When it was suggested to him that he might as well be transferred to Calcutta or any other place for better treatment, he gently declined expressing his desire to spend his last days in Mayavati itself. The doctors and all other inmates of the Ashrama did their best to make the Swami's life as comfortable as possible. He never lost his temper nor felt discontented despite his severe illness. Just a week before his death he foretold, 'A few days more! The end will come in the morning and not at night.'

One day he called the monastic inmates and told them: 'I have a little money remain-

ing with me. I would be very happy if with this amount you can prepare some salted and sweet dishes (*namkin, gaja*, etc.) and share those amongst yourselves in my presence. Moreover, if the fund permits, please include the servants and labourers of the Ashrama also.' Everything was arranged as he wished. While lying in bed, he gave all the necessary instructions to a brahmacharin and got the desired items prepared in his presence. He felt greatly satisfied to see the inmates relishing the refreshments to their hearts' content.

Just a few days before his passing away, Vimalananda's fever subsided. However, he had become so weak that he could not even turn his side without external help. On 23 July 1908 he took milk and medicines at 2 a.m. and wanted a bottle of hot water to be kept beside his bed. He seemed to be in a slumber around 4 a.m. and it continued till 6 a.m. After a short while he gently uttered *Om, Om, Om* thrice and the end came peacefully. The *Brahmavadin* wrote:

Vimalananda's end was as peaceful as his life had been, and he lay as one, resting from life's fretful fever, in the lap of the Blissful Mother, calm and absorbed in meditation as it were, with unspeakable beauty beaming from his face, as one who had at last conquered death and entered life everlasting. May his soul rest in peace!

His remains decorated with wreaths and flowers were carried by his beloved brother-monks, and taken to the junction of the two streams flowing below the Ashrama. Charming and beautiful was the spot and soul-touching was the scene, as his brother-swamis arranged the funeral pyre and solemnly chanted *mantras* from the Vedas, which vibrated the most sensitive of the heart's fibres. All present, in some silent subtle manner became merged into one aspiration for the blissfulness of the lately freed soul.¹⁰

Vimalananda was a born warrior. De-

9. Ibid., p. 451.

spite his failing health, he never gave up his struggle for eternal freedom. Rather, he diligently continued his spiritual practices till the end. He also cautioned the people around him not to forget the ultimate goal of life. In a letter written from Madras on 14 December 1906, he wrote to a devotee,

When you see some manifestation of Yoga power, such as seeing lights, hearing sounds, etc., do not think that you are very near your goal and rush to it in hot haste. All these manifestations are good, no doubt, and show that you are progressing. But when you get them, you should be on your guard not to delude yourself into the belief that the Final Goal is very near and that you can reach it by concentrating more deeply and for longer period of time.... You must meditate regularly every morning and evening and attend to the growth of your character. Make the foundation strong and all else will come in time. If you are in a hurry to realize without satisfying the preliminary condition, you will only make yourself worse. Have patience.... To realize the highest is not a joke. *Infinite patience, an adamant will* and, above all, *snow-white purity* are needed to reach the highest and it takes long to get these. If you run towards the goal without these, you will break yourself into pieces. Spiritual growth is always all-sided. One-sided growth, if carried too far, is in danger of tumbling down any moment, like a wall raised too high without a broad and deep foundation and without other walls holding it up by direct touch. Just as a bird cannot fly without its two wings and a tail, so also a man cannot realize the Highest without Yoga (concentration), practised along with the steadying of character and the broadening and deepening of the heart. I tell you all these not to discourage you but to warn you

against possible dangers. May the Lord shed more and more light on the path and give you strength of body and mind to tread it with unflinching devotion.¹¹

Vimalananda advocated a synthesis of knowledge and devotion. In an article he wrote,

On studying the scriptures we find that knowledge and devotion exist as if embracing each other. When we analyse the lives of saints we find in them a wonderful combination of knowledge and devotion...in reality, knowledge and devotion are not two separate entities, but different expressions of the same quality under different circumstances.¹²

Vimalananda, however, confessed that he too had entertained certain confusion regarding this age-old controversy, and that all his doubts vanished when he came into contact with the illustrious life of Swamiji. He said:

This is the very core of Swamiji's teachings: the Self-hood of all, the Divinity of man. And this is, I am fully convinced, the key to his wonderfully versatile nature. He was a lover of all, because he was a jnani. And here I must tell you that the fatal illusion under which I had long laboured that jnana and bhakti are destructive of each other, dispersed in the presence of Swamiji as darkness before the sun. Swamiji was a tremendous worker because he was a bhakta and jnani. The tremendous energy that shook the whole world and is still at work awakening many a slumbering soul to its innate Divinity, instilling life into its dead bones, bringing sunshine in the darkness of despair and love in dry, arid souls—this tremendous energy owes its

11. 'An Epistle of Swami Vimalananda', *Vedanta Kesari*, vol. 23, no. 10, pp. 386-7.

12. Swami Vimalananda, 'Jnan O Bhaktir Samanvaya', *Udbodhan*, Bhadra 1315 (Bengali Sakha), p. 473.

10. Ibid., pp. 451-2.

origin to his realization of Brahman in all. Here too, I must tell you that the fatally erroneous idea that karma is antagonistic to jnana and bhakti is dispelled at once by the life of Swamiji.¹³

In his reminiscences Vimalananda said:

My conviction that Swamiji's spiritual realization was of the highest order came to me not only from his intense purity, fearlessness, love of truth and universal sympathy, but also from those subtler personal manifestations described in our *shastras*. I have seen him weep like a child and become disconsolate at the name of God. I have seen him go into such deep meditation that even the function of the lungs stopped. Last of all came his own words to give the finishing touch to my conception of his spiritual greatness.¹⁴

While speaking of the extraordinary personality of Swamiji, Vimalananda clearly asserted that he learnt everything from the life of Swamiji. He said:

I have learnt that God can be enjoyed both within ourselves and outside ourselves; within ourselves by effacing completely from our consciousness all impression of the world of senses and making the spirit touch spirit, and outside ourselves by seeing God in everything and pouring out our hearts unto His feet in the shape of loving service.... And all these I have learnt from the life of Swamiji.¹⁵

Swamiji laid great emphasis on Faith (*Śraddhā*) as the basis of formation of character. Vimalananda too echoed the same idea in his inimitable style,

A man's real worth is estimated by

the amount of faith he has in the Supersensuous Existence for it always determines and gives shape to the nature of every work he does, every thought he thinks, and every move he makes. The greatest works of the world have been achieved by men of faith, and men of superior worth never fail to admire the heart which glows with its celestial blaze.¹⁶

As an incense-stick burns to the last bit and fills the environment with its fragrance, so Vimalananda quietly exhausted himself by carrying on till the last moment of his life, the service programmes started by his Guru. The following memorable tribute was paid to him by Swami Saradananda, one of the great disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and the first General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission:

O Man! Will you be able to comprehend this oblation of heart's blood by an ever-devoted disciple to the lotus feet of his Chosen Ideal, this offering of spontaneous love devoid of any selfish motive or hope of reward, this episode of silent worship of the heart without any fuss and away from the public eye? How many of you will even try to understand that? Most people usually understand only worldly life and make useless noise in this world of hullabaloo.¹⁷

Despite so much selfishness and strife this world of ours is still habitable because such exalted souls like Swami Vimalananda made it their abode at least for a short period. □

13. Swami Vimalananda, 'The Master As I Saw Him', *Vedanta Kesari*, vol. 9, nos. 9 and 10, p. 343.

14. *Reminiscences*, p. 315.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 314-15.

16. Swami Vimalananda, 'A Common Pitfall', *Prabuddha Bharata*, vol. 5, no. 4, p. 51.

17. Swami Abjayananda, *Swamijir Padaprante* (Bengali) (Belur Math: Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, 1972), p. 118.

Ramakrishna Mission Blind Boys' Academy, Narendrapur: An Overview

Seeing is always better than hearing or reading—this is very true in the case of the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission in general and especially of the Blind Boys' Academy of the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama at Narendrapur. Boys who have been handicapped by nature with less than normal vision upto and including total blindness demonstrate in this Institution and in the various avenues of work that infinite potential lies lodged in the soul which can be awakened to make one a useful member of the society. We believe that a reading of this brief report with illustrations will arouse interest in the general public to see for themselves the transformation this Institution is bringing about in the lives of the visually impaired boys.

We are thankful to Swami Asaktananda, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order and the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama at Narendrapur, for preparing this report for the Prabuddha Bharata.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur, is a large complex of educational institutions located at a place 16 kms. to the south of central Calcutta. A lush green meadow 5 kms. to the south of Garia, the last point of CMC (Calcutta Municipal Corporation), the Ashrama has several units of educational institutions of which a unique and comprehensive education centre for the visually handicapped known as the Ramakrishna Mission Blind Boys' Academy, Narendrapur, constitutes an integral part.

Inspired by Swami Vivekananda's ideals 'We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on one's own feet', the Blind Boys' Academy has been imparting life-centred education to visually impaired boys for the last 40 years. Started in 1957, the Ramakrishna Mission Blind Boys' Academy is now engaged in imparting the most up-to-date training and education to the blind with the ultimate goal of helping them manifest

their potentials and thereby to find fulfilment in life through socio-economic and cultural rehabilitation achieved by them by dint of their own merit and labour.

To make this possible, the Academy at present offers the following major courses of studies, education, training and other facilities for rehabilitation of the blind along with a course for preparing resource teachers for mainstream education as well:

1. General Education
2. Vocational Music
3. Industrial Vocational Training
4. Training in Agriculture & Animal Husbandry for the rural blind
5. Regional Teachers' Training Centre for the Teachers of the Visually Impaired Children
6. Regional Braille Press
7. Placement & Rehabilitation Services
8. Braille Library & Talking Book Studio
- Extension Programme
9. Computerized Braille Project

10. Community Based Rehabilitation Project

Auxiliary Programme

11. Sub-Contract Workshop

12. Demonstration Van for Mass Awareness

13. Swimming Pool Project

GENERAL EDUCATION

a) Since 1987 the Blind Boys' Academy has been affiliated to the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education. Till 1996, forty students have passed the Madhyamik Examination of the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education, all being placed in the 1st Division, 17 of them securing star marks (i.e. 75 per cent marks on the aggregate). Two students stood first in 1994 and 1996 respectively among the visually handicapped students.

b) Those who have aptitude and special talents for music are offered vocational music course to specialize in music in order that they may later take up music as their profession. (See Table I).

INDUSTRIAL VOCATIONAL TRAINING

As the country is now being industrialized, employment opportunities are to be found more in industry than elsewhere. Accordingly provisions have been made to train blind students suitably in handling power-driven machines. After completion of the training, a good number of blind

adults have been placed on the industrial jobs on the basis of their merit rather than on the compassionate ground. In recognition of their work in the industries some of them have received National Awards and/or State Awards as a most efficient disabled employee. (See Table II).

TRAINING IN AGRICULTURE & ANIMAL HUSBANDRY FOR THE RURAL BLIND

It is well known that the majority of blind population in India come from rural areas. It is therefore desirable that they should be trained in rural vocation, particularly in agriculture, animal husbandry and other allied areas for their socio-economic resettlement in their society. Keeping this in mind, the Academy started this Project in February 1973 to train up and resettle blind adults in the age group 16 to 35.

Although it was an experimental project initially, the results so far achieved bear testimony to the fact that the project has been a very successful venture. The trained blind adults are being resettled in *their profession* such as poultry, goat and cow-keeping, kitchen gardening and agriculture farming, etc. *in their home situation* which may be called self-employment. Some glimpses of resettlement of the rural blind adults during the period 1973-1996 are given in Table III.

Table I. Achievement Highlight (Music)

Institution	Course	Position	Vocal	Instrumental	Percussion
Rabindra Bharati University	Junior Diploma	1st Division	2	3	4
Prayag Sangeet Samity, Allahabad	Junior Diploma	1st Division	-	4	4
Sangeet Prabhakar, Allahabad	Junior Diploma	Distinction	-	3	-
		1st Division	-	1	7
Sarba Bharatiya Sangeet Parishad recognized by the Government of West Bengal	Junior Diploma	Distinction	2	-	-
		1st Division	1	-	-

REGIONAL TEACHERS' TRAINING CENTRE FOR THE TEACHERS OF THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED CHILDREN

Teaching the blind is a specialized job and the scarcity of specially trained teachers to teach the blind poses a great problem to the task of educating the visually impaired. To overcome this obstacle, the Academy started training such teachers on a regional basis in 1965. Since then trainees representing different schools and organizations for the blind as well as freshers from Eastern India and other parts of the country are being trained to tackle the multifarious problems of the visually impaired individuals. (See Table IV).

REGIONAL BRAILLE PRESS

To impart proper education, Braille books are the most important and essential for the blind. To facilitate easy and speedy supply of braille texts, the Academy started a Regional Braille Press in 1967 at the Blind Boys' Academy, Narendrapur, which is producing Braille books to meet the needs of blind students living in the eastern and north-eastern regions of India (Assam, Orissa, West Bengal, Tripura, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, etc.). The Press has completed brailing of books from classes I to X, some books for higher secondary classes and annual calendars. The languages covered by the Press are Bengali, English,

Table II. A Brief Statistical Data on Light Engineering Training and Placement (1964-1996)

Total number of trainees	Total number of placement			Name of the important industries where the ex-trainees are employed	Name of the major trades related to self employment
	Engaged in Industrial jobs	Other than Industrial jobs	Self employed		
462	174	29	17	(a) Railway Workshop (Kanchrapara, Liluah, Kharagpur, Jamalpur, Chittaranjan)	(a) P.C.O. (STD/ISD Booth)
				(b) Hindustan Lever	(b) Retailing (small business)
				(c) Britannia Industries Ltd.	(c) Noodles manufacturing
				(d) Andrew Yule Co. Ltd.	(d) Cloth selling
				(e) Phillips India Ltd.	

Number of National Award Winners: 8

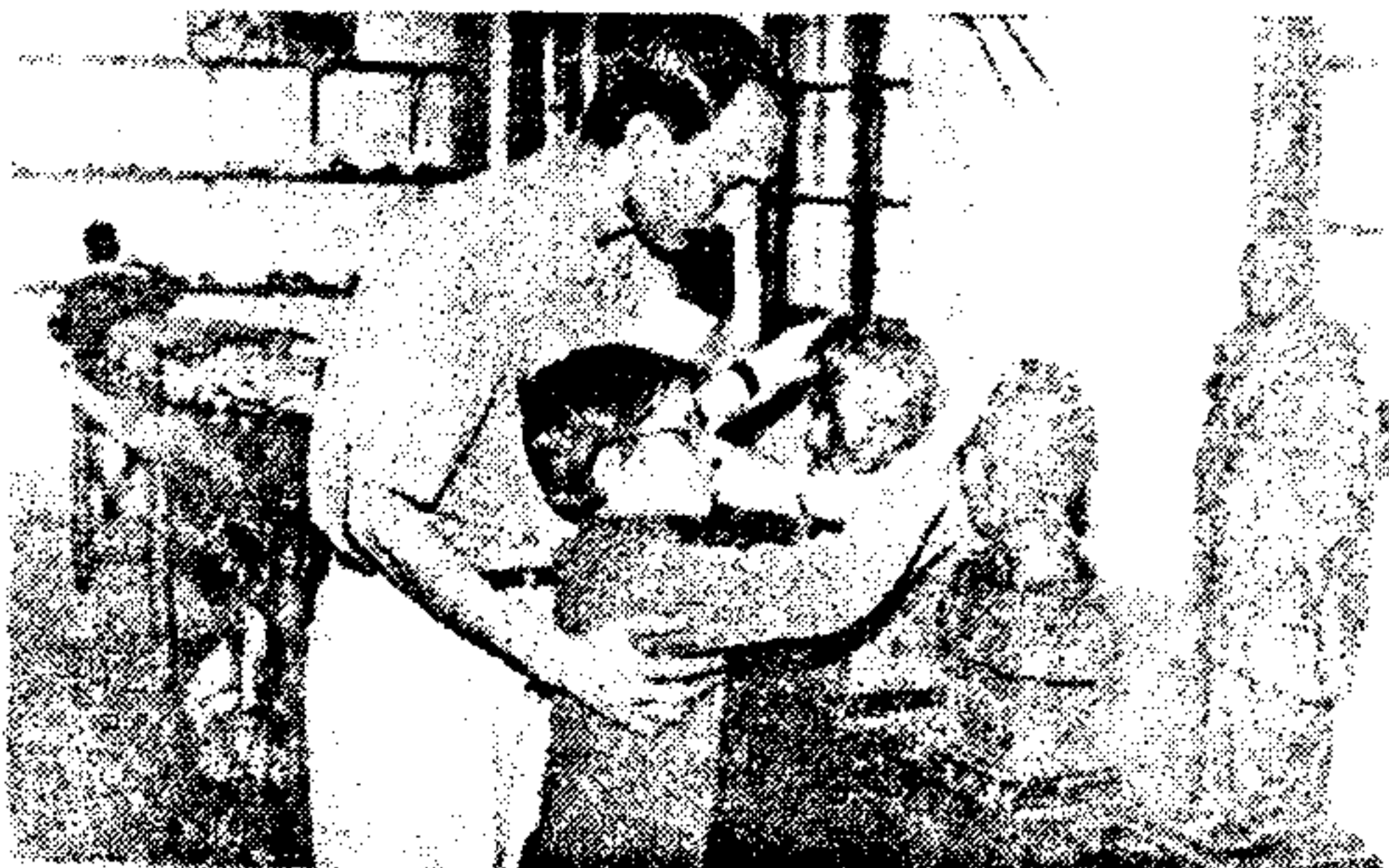
Number of State Award Winners: 14

Table III. Resettlement of Rural Blind Adults (1973-1996)

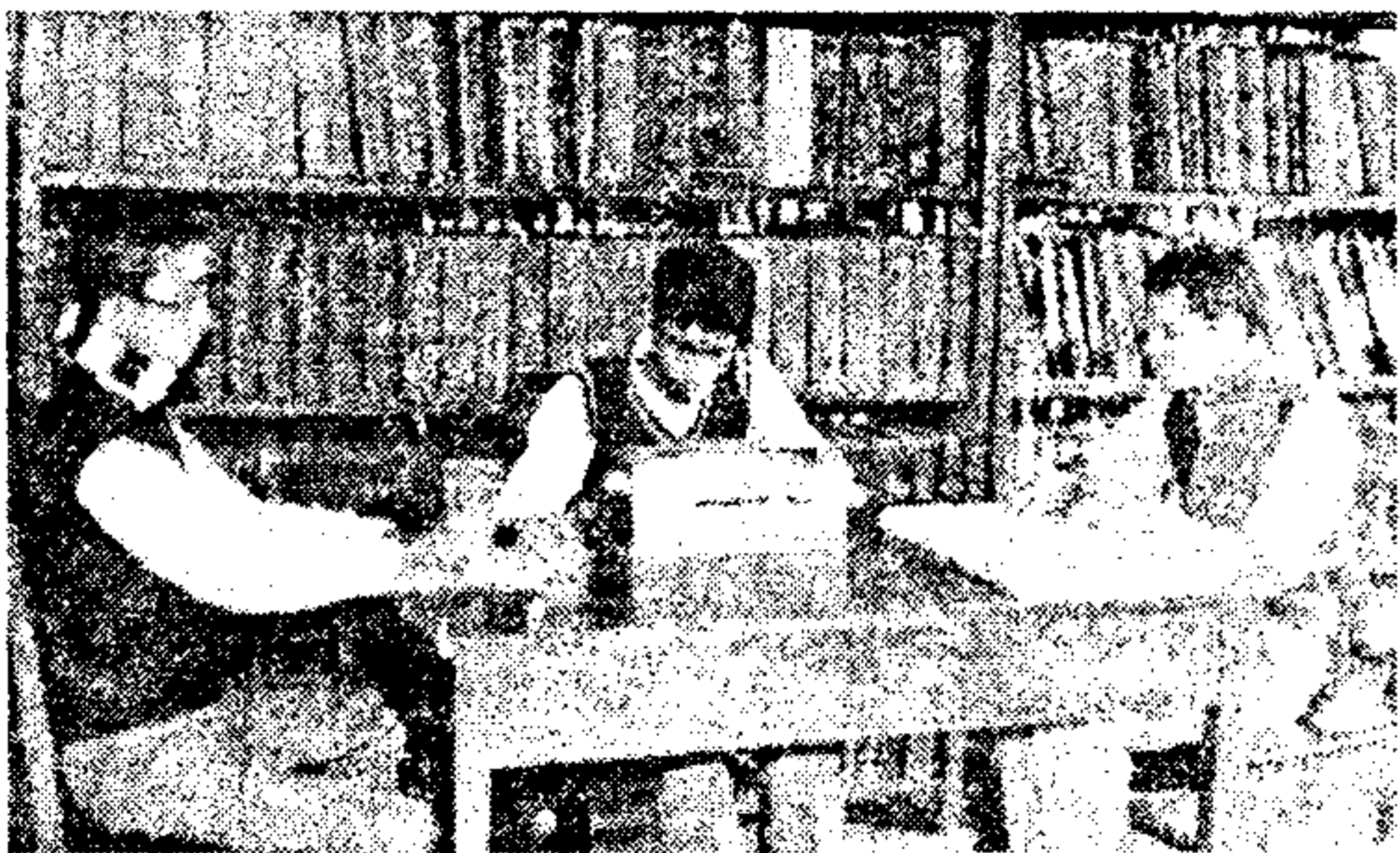
Total number of trained rural blind adults	Total number of resettled rural blind adults	Resettled in			Number of National Awardees	Number of State Awardees
		Cow keeping	Poultry Farming	Mixed farming (Agriculture and Animal Husbandry)		
223	222	135	46	41	6	16



Academy Building



Blind students forming concept by touch in the Concept Formation Class



Visually handicapped students reading and writing with Braille Slates and Perkins Brailier



Blind Students forming the concept of the Globe in the Geography Class



Blind students forming a concept of the human body by touch



Blind students making morah and doormats in the Craft Class



Blind students performing in Orchestra



A visually handicapped trainee learning how to operate a Centre Lathe in Training Shop



Trainees of the Light Engineering Section learning filing operation



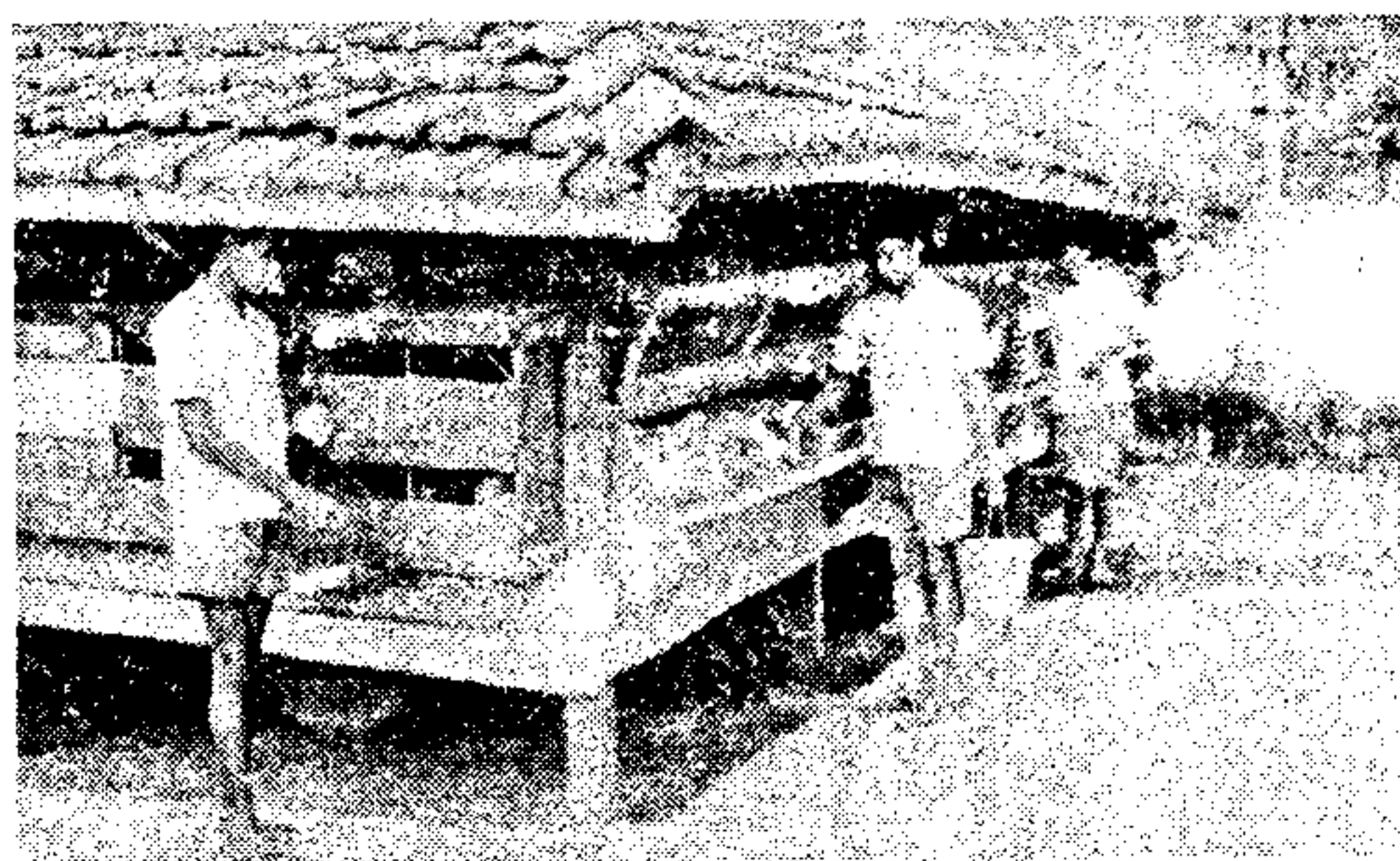
Rural blind trainees engaged in forking operation in the Training Farm



Rural blind trainees engaged in mulching operation in the potato plot of the Training Farm



Rural blind trainees engaged in paddy straw cutting operation



Rural blind trainees giving water and mash to the poultry birds and collecting eggs from the egg laying box



Blind students reading Braille books in the library



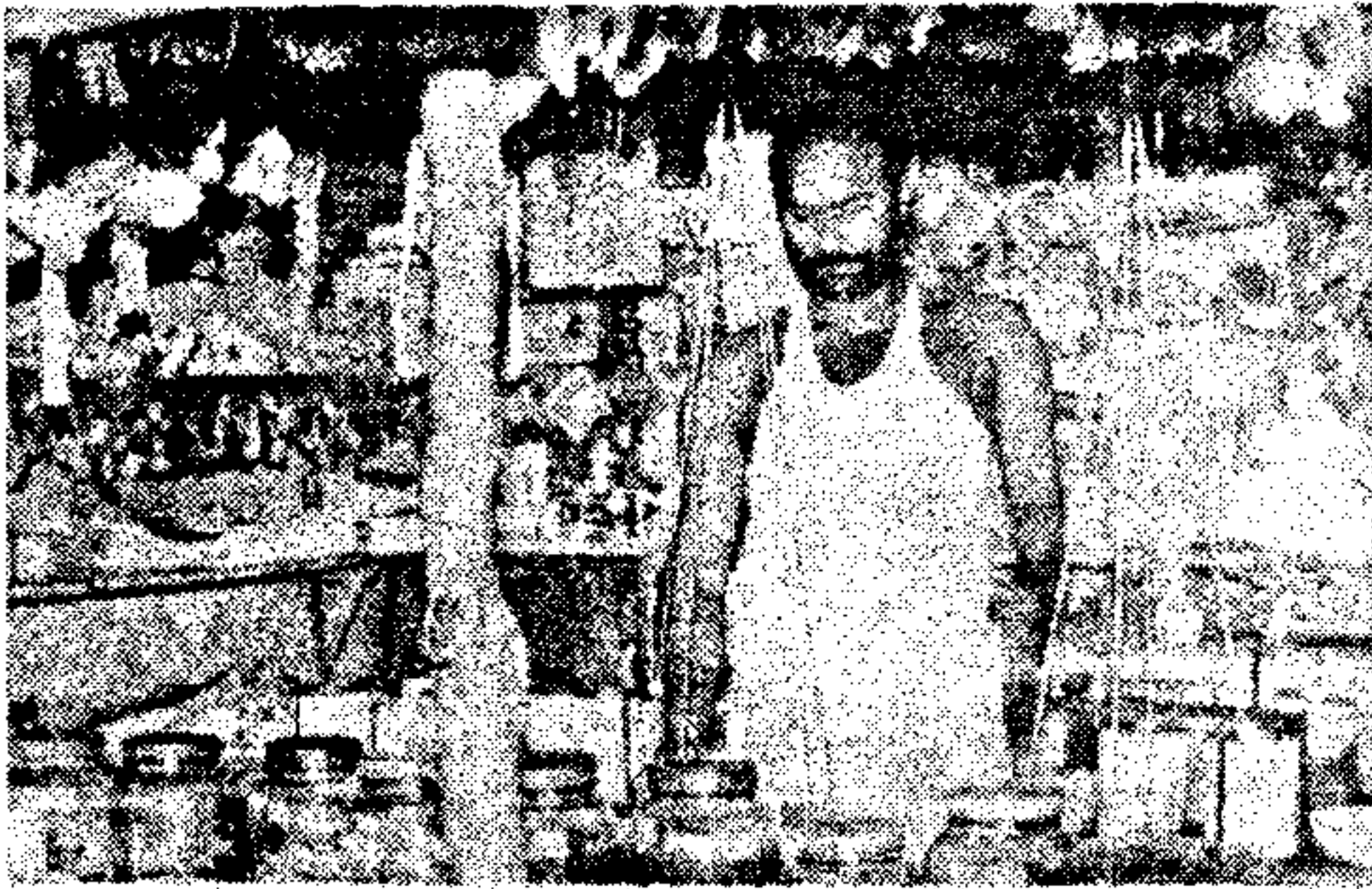
Visually handicapped students using ear phone in the Talking Book Studio



A worker operating the Perkins Brailier through computer (Braillescript Project)



Braille Books being produced on a computerized Braille Printer



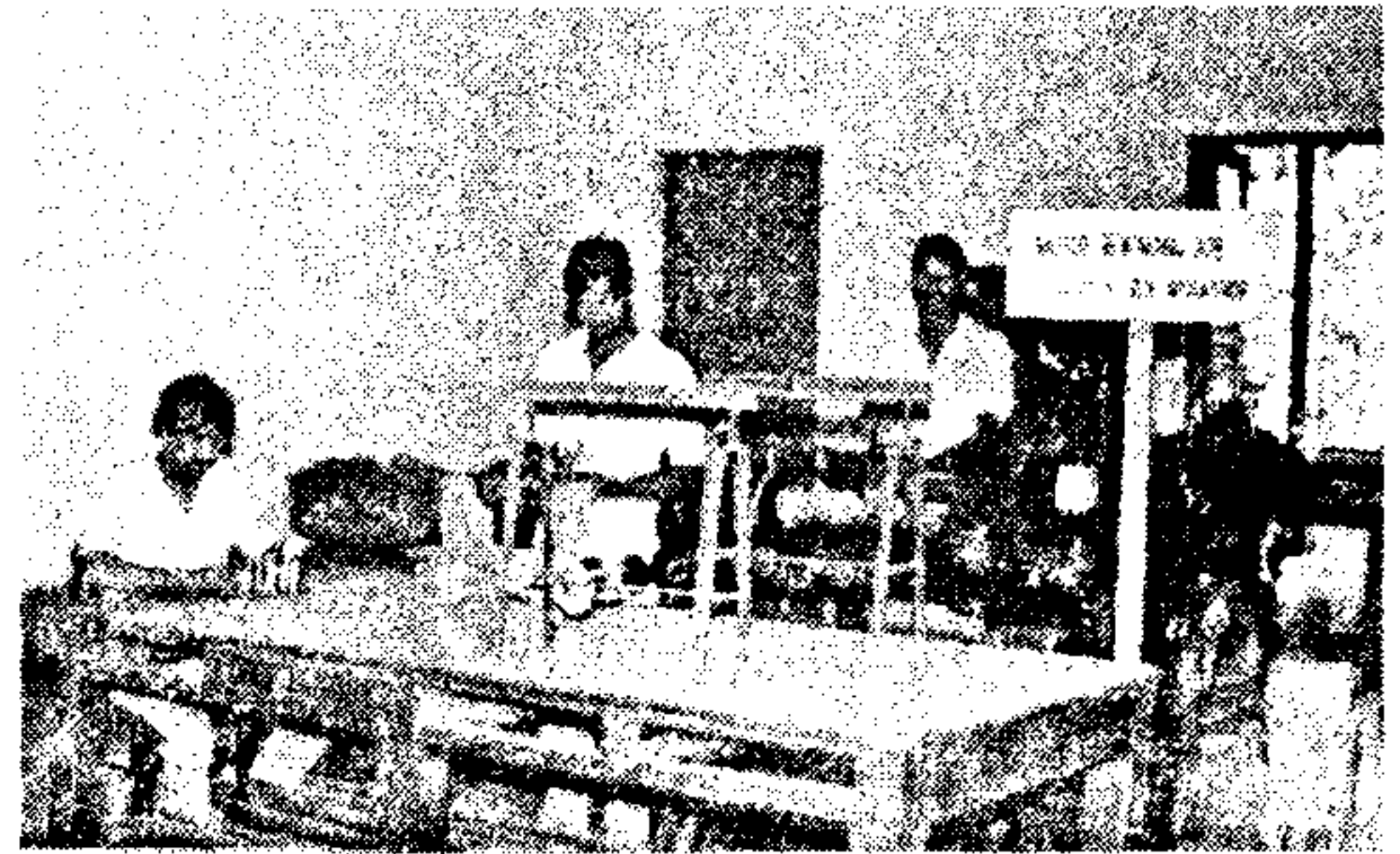
An orthopaedically disabled person engaged in a grocery shop



Trained blind workers in the packaging section of the Spice Grinding Unit



A visually handicapped worker using a pulverizer in the Spice Grinding Unit



Trained blind workers engaged in Electric-motor Re-winding job



Blind students in action in the Swimming Pool



Visually handicapped students playing cricket

Sanskrit, Assamese, Oriya and Manipuri. (See Table V).

tains to facilitate recording of reading materials as also listening to the sound-scribed books for a single individual.

PLACEMENT AND REHABILITATION SERVICES

The Academy keeps constant touch with industries and employers and seeks job placement for the trained blind boys in different industries.

BRAILLE LIBRARY AND TALKING BOOK STUDIO

The Academy has also a very well-equipped library of Braille and Ink Print Books along with talking books which is used as a reference library by the research workers. A well-equipped Talking Books Studio started functioning in 1976. It main-

COMPUTERIZED BRAILLE PROJECT (BRAILLESRIPT)

The Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama has recently installed a computer machine in its Braille Press for faster production of Braille books to meet the growing demand of Braille reading materials among the blind. As a part of research and development project, the machine is indigenously devised and is being further developed by a group of scientists from the Jadavpur University, Calcutta.

A technologically advanced Norwe-

Table IV. A Brief Analysis of the Regional Teachers Training Centre on the Basis of Teachers Trained (1965–1996)

<i>Name of the Course</i>	<i>Number of trainees</i>
<i>Certificate Course (1965–1968)</i>	37
<i>Diploma Course (1969–1984)</i>	133
<i>Primary Level Course (1985–86 to 1987–88)</i>	24
<i>Secondary Level Course (1988–89 to 1995–96)</i>	172

Total number of Schools/Organizations covered: 74

Total number of trainees trained: 366

Table V. Particulars of Embossing and Publishing Braille Reading Materials from 1967 to 1996

<i>Language</i>	<i>Number of titles</i>	<i>Complete in Volume (approx.)</i>	<i>Number of volumes printed/reprinted</i>	<i>Number of volumes Sold/Distributed</i>
<i>Assamese</i>	51	69	3,403	3,007
<i>Bengali</i>	248	383	70,084	65,493
<i>English</i>	164	227	40,016	36,047
<i>Manipuri</i>	3	3	166	166
<i>Oriya</i>	2	3	192	168
<i>Sanskrit</i>	11	15	2,238	2,109
<i>Total</i>	479	700	1,16,099	1,06,990

gian machine for embossing Braille books has recently been installed in the Regional Braille Press. The capacity of the machine to emboss standard Braille pages (10" x 12") is 1200 per hour and 400 characters per second. It is expected that it will fulfil in near future the growing demand of Braille books by the institutions for the visually impaired in the eastern and north-eastern regions of India as well as the greater part of India.

COMMUNITY BASED REHABILITATION PROJECT

The majority of the handicapped population including that of West Bengal live in the villages. This vast number of rural handicapped demand that they should be educated, trained and rehabilitated *within their natural surroundings and in the communities they live in*. At present these welfare services are rendered mainly to the *urban* disabled.

There is hardly any sincere attempt for the socio-economic rehabilitation of the *rural* disabled. The Blind Boys' Academy of the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur, had long felt the need for starting a project in the remote rural areas. The project location lies within 15 villages of Gosaba sector of Sunderbans which is a neglected area. The Community Based Rehabilitation Project for the rural disabled has been conceived as a part of national strategies to alleviate the sufferings of rural disabled people. The activities envisaged under the project are broadly prevention, early detection, intervention, medical care, psycho-social and vocational rehabilitation, employment, creation of awareness, manpower training for Community Based Rehabilitation personnel, etc. Comprehensive rehabilitation services have been introduced in the operational areas utilizing the principles of community based rehabilitation enunciated by World Health Organization and implemented with success by several developing

countries. (See Table VI).

SUB-CONTRACT WORKSHOP

Immediately after completing the training, employment is not available for anyone not to speak of blind persons who need to be employed for all reasons. Again there are and there would be some workers who are laid off or retrenched from the jobs due to industrial unrest. They also need some engagement for earning their bread. But to find an alternative employment, a difficult proposition for blind persons, the Ramakrishna Mission Blind Boys' Academy started a Sub-contract Workshop for blind workers in 1967. To meet this challenging task due to unemployment and retrenchment, sub-contract jobs are taken from industries like Jay Engineering Works Ltd., Usha Fan Industries, etc. and the blind workers are assigned to these jobs on piece rates. (See Table VII).

DEMONSTRATION VAN FOR MASS AWARENESS

Under the placement department of the Academy, a Demonstration Van was introduced in 1976. It is an exhibition installed in a demonstration van equipped with power-driven mini lathe, grinding and drill machine, and one hand-driven rubberband cutting machine. The students of the Industrial Training Centre work on these machines in front of spectators to give them a practical idea about the blind persons' potential.

SWIMMING POOL PROJECT

Swimming is one of the less expensive and perhaps the best physical exercise that we can offer specially to the blind whose physical activities are otherwise restricted. Swimming also cultivates in blind children the self-confidence which is very much essential for their all-round development. The training project in swimming came into existence in 1978 and has created jubilation among the blind youngsters. They have won

prizes in State/National Level Swimming events.

GAMES & SPORTS

The students of the Blind Boys' Acad-

emy take active part in sports and indoor & outdoor games. They participate in competitions organized by different institutions or organizations, State and National Level, in

Table VI. Community Based Rehabilitation Service at Gosaba (1993-1996)

Sl. No.	Rehabilitated in Rural Vocation	Number of clients
1.	Goat & Sheep Keeping	16
2.	Poultry Farming	8
3.	Cow Keeping	2
4.	Grocery Shop	8
5.	Net Making	1
6.	Tailoring Machine and Cloth	4
7.	Piggery	7
8.	Net & Boat	2
9.	Pisciculture	10
10.	Betel Leaf Cultivation	1
11.	Rice Processing	10
12.	Stationery Shop	1
13.	Pumping Machine (Kirloskar)	1
14.	Rickshaw Van	1
15.	Educational Rehabilitation	13
16.	Fertilizer, Pesticide, Seeds Shop	1
17.	Medical Rehabilitation	2
Total		88

Male clients: 54; Female clients: 34; Total: 88

Caste

Scheduled Caste: 62; Scheduled Tribe: 7; Others: 19

Nature of Disability

Orthopaedical: 65

Deaf & Dumb: 17

Blind: 5

Multi handicap (Blind and Orthopaedical): 1

Monthly Income: Rs. 350/- to Rs. 1300/-

1. Distribution of Aids & Appliances: Caliper Shoes, Hearing Aids, Tri-wheeler, Crutch, Wheel Chair, Sticks. Beneficiaries: Male: 73; Female: 51; Total: 124.

2. Pulse Polio Vaccination: Number of children vaccinated: 1883.

3. Eye check-up and Awareness regarding Eye Care:

Number of primary schools covered: 6

Number of children examined: 543

Number of children referred to Ophthalmologists: 157.

various events such as Athletic Meets, Cricket matches, Swimming, Chess competition, etc. The school team has a good record in cricket matches which the Academy can boast of. The Blind Boys' Academy Cricket team has won championship and other cups and medals of State and National importance. Some of the students of the Blind Boys' Academy excelled in swimming and track events in National competitions.

OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENTS

It is a great pleasure to mention that the Blind Boys' Academy was selected for receiving the National Award by the Government of India for its outstanding contribution to the welfare of the disabled persons in India for the year 1983. The President of India handed over to the Secretary of the Ashrama a citation and a draft for rupees one lakh on the 16 April 1983 at New Delhi.

The Blind Boys' Academy also received the RCI-Hong Kong Foundation International Award (Institutional) for the pioneering work in the field of the visually handicapped. Royal Netherlands's Ambassador in India handed over to the Secretary of the Ashrama a memento and a cheque for Rs. 25,000/- on 25 February 1995 at New Delhi.

In conclusion it can be said that the Ramakrishna Mission Blind Boys' Academy is exploring every avenue to serve the cause of the visually impaired persons so that they can stand on their own feet and maintain their livelihood. A ray of hope is now in sight that the blind persons will get their position in the mainstream of the society. They will never remain a burden but an asset in the process of progress and development of the country. □

Table VII. Sub-Contract Workers Engaged in Different Jobs

Sl. No.	Name of the Job	Number of Workers	Remarks
1.	Spice Grinding	8	Produced by the Blind Boys' Academy
2.	Motor Re-winding	1	Contract job from Eastern Railway
3.	Folding Stick Manufacturing	2	Manufactured by the Blind Boys' Academy
4.	Reaming and facing of connecting rod	1	Contract job from Jay Engineering Works Ltd.

CORRECTIONS, January 1997 issue

On p. 81, Column 2, line 15 above footnote: After "like a glow at the heart.", close the quote and add: "And he said to me, 'Good, keep on.' That is all he ever taught me. But we had been meditating before we ever met him, and we knew the Gita by heart."

On p. 88, below title line: (As on June 30, 1996) should read (As on 1 October 1996).

On p. 89, column 1, line 6: After Ritajananda 1954-1959 add (to Hollywood).

On p. 90, column 2, line 1: Kansas City, Kansas should read Kansas City, Missouri.

On p. 91, column 1, line 2 from bottom: After Aparmananda 1979-1985 add (to Berkeley).

On p. 93, column 1, line 4: Amarananda 1989-present should not be indented.

On p. 93, column 1, item 6 under COLOMBO: Pranaveshananda 1932-1933 should read Pranaveshananda 1931-1932.

On p. 94: The 'note' at the end of the page should be read at the end of the chart on p. 95.

News and Reports



CELEBRATION OF THE CENTENARY OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S RETURN TO INDIA IN 1897:

*Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai and the
Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalyaya,
Coimbatore*

Swami Vivekananda's attending the World Parliament of Religions held at Chicago from 11 to 17 September 1893, his captivating the world forum by his spiritual power, intellectual exposition of the Indian culture and spirituality and his message of religious harmony and humanism, are now a well-known part of history. After his tri-

umphal preaching for four years in America and Europe, he returned to India like a home-coming victor and hero.

Swami Vivekananda travelled to Chennai (Madras) touching several cities on the way and, through speeches and conversations, cast his subtle influence on the minds and hearts of the hearers.

1. Swami Vivekananda landed in India at Rameswaram from Colombo (Sri Lanka) on 26 January 1897 and reached Chennai on 6 February after covering Ramanathapuram, Paramakudi, Manamadurai, Madurai, Tiruchirapalli, Thanjavur, Kumbakonam, Dindigul and Chengalpattu.

2. In all the above places visited by him en-route to Chennai, he addressed the people of the above cities and asked them to arise, awake and build a great India of the future. He received tumultuous welcome and ovation and drew large crowds at every one of the places.

3. He reached Chennai on 6 February 1897 from Chengalpattu and stayed upto 14 February at the Vivekananda Illam (Vivekananda House, then named Ice House) at Marina, for a total of nine days during which he met most of the elite of the Metropolis like Shri C. Rajagopalachari (the first Indian Governor General after Independence) and delivered five famous public lectures on the national work to be done in India.

The Centenary of Swami Vivekananda's triumphant return from the West to India was celebrated on quite a grand and befitting scale by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, in collaboration with Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalyaya, Coimbatore. Highlights of the celebrations are as follows:

Swamiji had landed at Kundukkal in Pamban on 26 January 1897. The exact spot was identified and a couple of boats sailed from Danushkoti with a Jyoti (lighted lamp) and a charming painting of Swamiji seated in Chicago pose. The Jyoti and the painting were received ceremoniously by Govinda Nadar, Chief of Fishermen, and Swami Gautamanandaji, President of Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, and taken in a procession to Pamban town. Swamiji was received with *Pūrṇakumbham* and chanting of Vedic mantras by 63 priests. Thereafter Swami Gautamanandaji performed *ārati* and symbolically installed Swamiji on a magnificent Ratha (decorated tabelau). This colourful Ratha depicted Swamiji as sitting on a throne surrounded by lions. The Ratha was accompanied by the Vivekananda Kendra's well-known float of Swamiji as a wandering monk. At Pamban town a public meeting was held in which the local people paid tributes to Swamiji. Then a long procession consisting of more than 2000 school children proceeded from Lakshmana Tirtha Bus Stand to the Rameswaram temple, a distance of about 3 kms. Temple honours which included salute by an elephant were offered to Swamiji at the Rameswaram Temple under the direction of the Head Priest of the temple who is a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna.

The next day, 27 January, a public meeting was held before the Rameswaram Temple and a number of monks spoke on the relevance of Swamiji's message to the modern generation. Prizes were also distributed to the winners of various competitions held by the Rameswaram Citizen's Committee.

On 28 January a party of monks and devotees went by three boats to Danushkoti. Though Danushkoti had been washed away in the cyclone of 1964, it was possible to have a holy bath this year. In the evening puja and cultural programmes were held at Vivekananda Kudil. The house where Swamiji was

accommodated by Setupathi and named Viveka Bhaskara by the Raja was made available for the few days of the celebration.

On 29 January, the convoy went round the four Mada Streets of Rameswaram Temple when people from almost every house offered *ārati*. The convoy moved on to Ramanathapuram and reached there at noon. However, due to communal tension in the area, no procession could be taken out. Only a reception was given at the Municipal Office by the office bearers. The devotees at Ramanathapuram had made elaborate arrangements for the procession as also for holding a public meeting followed by a cultural programme. They were thoroughly disappointed that the same could not be held. The students and the staff of two schools paid a visit.

On the morning of 30th January the convoy started off for Paramakudi and Manamadurai where public meetings and cultural programmes were conducted. The convoy then proceeded to the Ramakrishna Math centre at Madurai on the night of 30th.

On 31 January was the *tithipuja* of Swamiji. The occasion was celebrated with all solemnity and the devotees had the *darshan* of Swamiji on the Ratha.

On 1 February, there was a procession of students and staff of the local schools and of devotees from the Perumal Temple to Raja Muthaiah Mandram. A public meeting was held there on a grand scale.

On 2 February, the convoy reached Tiruchirapally and here too it was not possible to take out a procession. In the evening a public meeting followed by a very charming dance drama was held. The next morning witnessed a captivating procession of 100 two-wheelers all the way to BHEL complex (Tiruchirapally) where a small meeting was held.

On 3 February, the convoy reached Thanjavur around noon where besides an impressive meeting and cultural programme, a plaque commemorating

Swamiji's passing through Thanjavur Railway Station in 1897 was unveiled at the Station.

On 4 February, the convoy reached Kumbakonam. The procession from Mahamaham Tank and the public meeting at the Town High School were very impressive. What made the procession so grand is a variety of special items such as an elephant at the head of the procession, a dancing horse (which is a special attraction), bands, *nādasvaram*, *karagāṭṭam*, *kolāṭṭam*, etc.

On 5 February, the procession reached Panruti where a grand reception and meeting were held. In the evening the Ratha reached Chengalpattu. A century ago, in a nearby Railway Station Swamiji's train had been forcibly halted by devotees by laying themselves on the tracks. Swamiji had responded to their ovation. This year there was a procession of about ten thousand students and public extending to a length of 3 kms.—the grandest outside Chennai. The public meeting and the cultural show at Chengalpattu Mission grounds were both impressive.

On 6 February, the procession reached Chennai at 2:15 p.m. where the Divisional Manager, Southern Railways, received Swamiji with an offering of garland. A procession of more than 12,000 students from 45 institutions in the City together with the general public was flagged off from the Rajaratnam Stadium by the Director General of Police, Sri R.K. Raghavan, an elderly ex-student of the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda College. The route taken by the procession was exactly the same as the one followed by Swamiji a century ago and led to Castle Kernan which is now known as Vivekananda Illam (House) after walking a distance of 6½ kms in about 2 hours. This procession is the grandest that Chennai has seen in recent years and did a lot to rekindle the interest of the citizens in the Ramakrishna Movement. A public meeting was held in front of the statue of Swamiji beside

the Vivekananda Illam. The Hon'ble Minister for Education, Government of Tamil Nadu, Prof. K. Anbazhagan, the Founder President of Tamil Maanila Congress, Shri G.K. Moopanar, and the Hon'ble Minister of State for Youth Affairs & Sports, Govt. of India, Sri R. Dhanushkoti Athithan, addressed the audience. The popular musician Smt. Vani Jairam sang the invocation song in Tamil composed by herself on Swamiji. It was greatly appreciated by the huge audience. **The Education Minister, after pointing out the contribution of Swamiji for the removal of social evils like caste, etc. announced that the Ramakrishna Math's request to the Government to hand over to them the Vivekananda Illam was being favourably considered by the Government and the technical details would be finalised in a few days. This announcement was greeted with tremendous applause by the huge audience.**

Public meetings were held on the succeeding eight days at various centres. On 7 February at the Rasika Ranjani Sabha there was a full length drama titled 'Yuga Purush Swami Vivekananda' presented by the Vivekananda Educational Society.

On 8 February, Dr. Prabhushankara and Sri Cho. Ramaswamy, the well-known editor of *Tuglak*, spoke at the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama at Tyagarayanagar.

On 9 February, meetings at the Students' Home were held both in the morning and the evening. A cultural programme was held in which school children from Vivekananda Vidyabhavan, P.S. Senior Secondary School, Mylapore, Padma Seshadri Bala Bhavan Senior Secondary School, Nungambakkam, and Ramakrishna Mission School, Chengalpattu, participated and put up a splendid show.

On 10 February the venue for the celebrations was the Sarada Vidyalaya, Usman Road. Smt. C. Siva Sankri, Writer and Founder Trustee, AGNI Trust, Dr. Sudha Seshaiyan, Addl. Prof. of Anatomy, Stanley

Medical College, and Sri M. Saravanan, Managing Partner, AVM Cine Productions took part and all spoke with great fervour on their contact with the Ramakrishna Movement and how it had moulded their own lives. This was followed by a well appreciated cultural programme on Swamiji's life.

On 11 February the public meeting at the Sri Ramakrishna Math was addressed by Sri B.A. Kodandarama Setty, Director, Vivek Limited, followed by a music concert by the Bombay Sisters C. Lalita and C. Saroja which was attended by a sizeable audience.

On the afternoon of 12 February there was a *Kathākālakṣepam* on Swamiji at Sarada Vidyalaya by Smt. Gowri Rajagopal, an old student of the school. The public meeting held at the Vivekananda College in the same evening was addressed by the Chief Guest Dr. N. Mahalingam, Chairman of the Sakthi Group, and thereafter, the Fine Arts Club of the College presented a classical music concert.

On 13 February a procession was taken out. This was followed by a public meeting and cultural show at the Vivekananda Vidyalaya Junior College at Korattur, an industrial suburb of Chennai.

On 14 February, the concluding day of the celebrations, the valedictory function was held at the Sri Ramakrishna Math. Revered Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, one of the Vice Presidents of the Ramakrishna Order delivered the benedictory address and Sangeeta Kalanidhi Smt. M.S. Subbhalakshmi held the audience spell-bound through her devotional songs for more than 1½ hours. This attracted perhaps the biggest audience that the Math had seen in recent times.

At all the above functions attractive mementoes were presented not only to the guests and speakers, but also to the prominent helpers and donors in the celebrations.

From the 7th to the 14th February, a Question-Answer Workshop was held at

the Sri Ramakrishna Math in the morning from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. in which the six lectures of Swamiji delivered at Chennai were read out by Swami Tyagananda, the Editor, *Vedanta Kesari*, and the implications of Swamiji's message were very minutely discussed. This was highly appreciated by the participants at the Workshop.

Swamiji left Chennai on 15 February 1897 by steamer for Calcutta. This was commemorated by holding a small meeting at the Port Trust where the Chairman of the Port Trust, Sri Ramakrishnan, IAS, an ex-student of the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda College, was present. The wharf from which Swamiji had sailed happens to be very near the place from where the assembly of monks and devotees were taken around in a steamer. **The Chairman announced that he was renaming the wharf 'Vivekananda Wharf'.**

For a whole week the two floats on which two images of Swamiji had been mounted were taken into various slums where monks spoke to the slum dwellers. This elicited remarkable response from them who were thrilled to hear Swamiji's message. It is to be noted that right from Rameswaram to the Port Trust, Chennai, *free booklets containing various lectures delivered by Swamiji were distributed.*

The Doordarshan and the Cable TV Networks covered most of the programmes. AIR (All India Radio) also broadcast special programmes during the celebrations. The news media, especially the Tamil Newspapers, gave elaborate account of each day's function right from that at Rameswaram to the valedictory function on the 14th February.

Everyone felt that this is only the beginning of a New Era of Swamiji's ideas and ideals. Appropriate follow-up action is being contemplated to keep alive the enthusiastic response of the people to Swamiji's call.

*The Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama,
Manasadwip*

The Centenary of Swamiji's triumphant return from the West was celebrated at nine places of South Sunderban Islands during the period 22 to 27 January and 8 to 11 February, 1997 through worship, distribution of prasad, religious discourses, speeches, recitation and musical performance by students and youth. Two High Schools, two primary schools, three youth clubs, and devotees participated in the celebrations. Swamis Dharmadananda and Hitakamananda of the Ramakrishna Order, Sri Gour Gopal Saha of Vivekananda Yuva Mahamandal and Sri Jnanendranath Bera, retired headmaster of the Bhuban Nagar High School were among the speakers. Similar celebrations were scheduled at Namkhana and Kakdwip on 28 February and 14 March 1997 respectively. □

*RAMAKRISHNA MISSION VIDYAPITH,
DEOGHAR*

PLATINUM JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS

The Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar, established at Mihijam in 1922 by Swami Sadbhavananda with the blessings of Srimat Swami Turiyananda, is celebrating its Platinum Jubilee this year. The first phase of the year-long programme between February 9 and 12 was timed to coincide with the Saraswati Puja on which occasion Srimat Swami Shivananda had formally consecrated the Deoghar campus in 1926. This phase of the programme was inaugurated by Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, on 9 February 1997. The General Secretary released a book, *Atma Vikas*, led a large procession of monks, Alumni, students and Youth Retreat Delegates around the campus, and planted a Bodhi-vriksha sapling on the first day. There was also a Youth Retreat for school and college students attended by 135 delegates.

The second day saw a colourful procession through the streets of Deoghar. This was followed by the General Body Meeting of Alumni Association. Prizes for the year-long series of competitions in essay writing, elocution, recitation, music, drawing, etc. organized by the Vidyapith among students of the local schools and colleges were awarded in a grand function. Saraswati Puja was celebrated on 11 February. The students of the Vidyapith performed a drama, the Alumni presented a cultural programme, and there were bhajans by well-known singers. A large number of monks, teachers, Alumni and students of local schools and colleges attended the functions.

The second phase will be conducted from 18 to 25 June and will comprise a Youth Retreat for school and college students of Bihar and neighbouring states. The concluding phase will be held during 9 to 15 November 1997. □

*NATIONAL YOUTH DAY CELEBRATION:
SWAMIJI'S ANCESTRAL HOME*

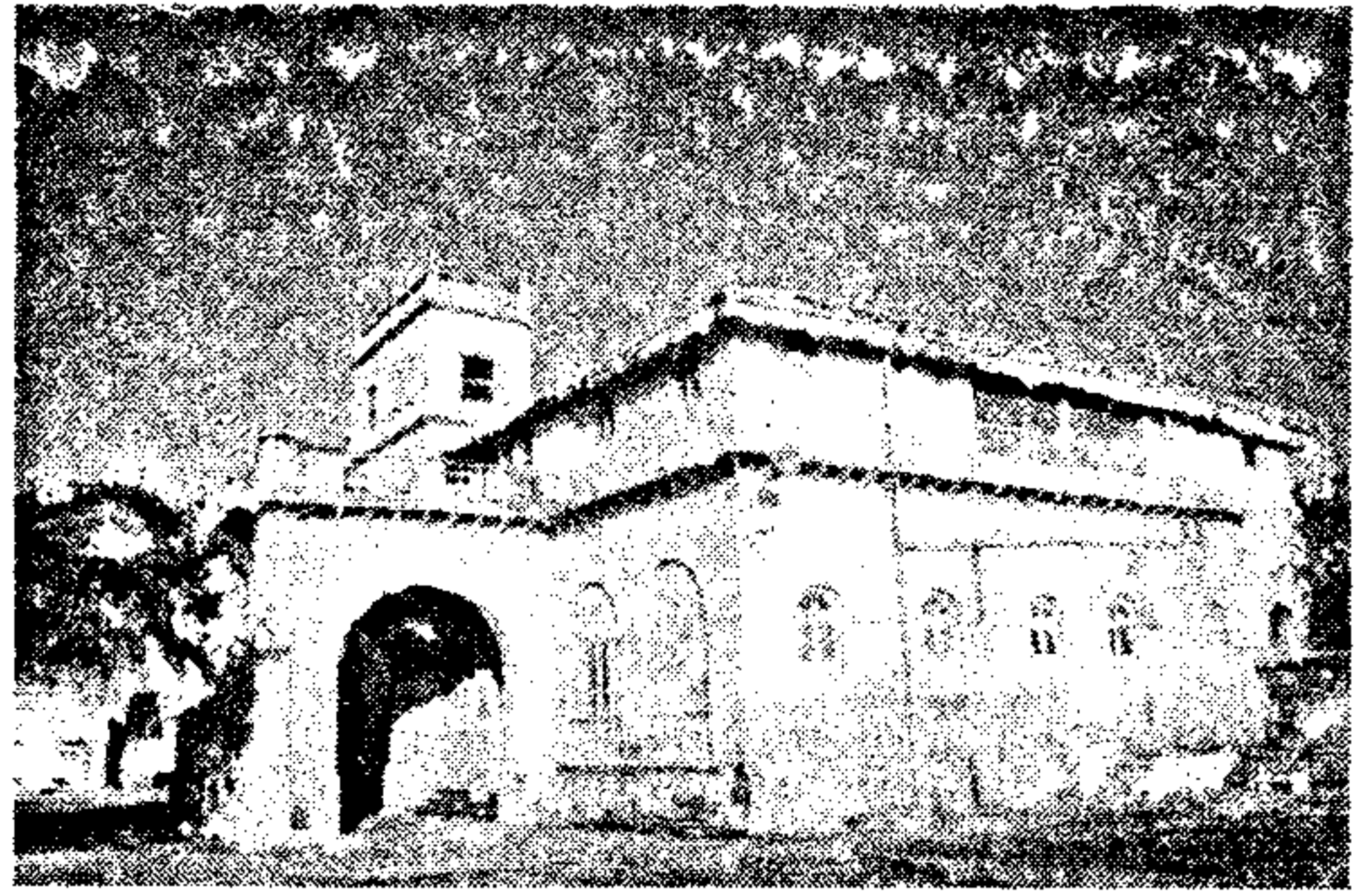
The Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission celebrated the National Youth Day at the premises of Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral Home in a befitting manner. Boys and girls from different parts of the city converged on Swamiji's ancestral home in seven colourful processions and took part in the programme consisting of speeches, recitation and devotional songs. Swami Lokeshwaranandaji Maharaj presided over the function. In the evening there was a musical performance by some of the monks of the Ramakrishna Order. □

*RAMAKRISHNA MISSION VIVEKANANDA
MEMORIAL AT PORBANDAR*

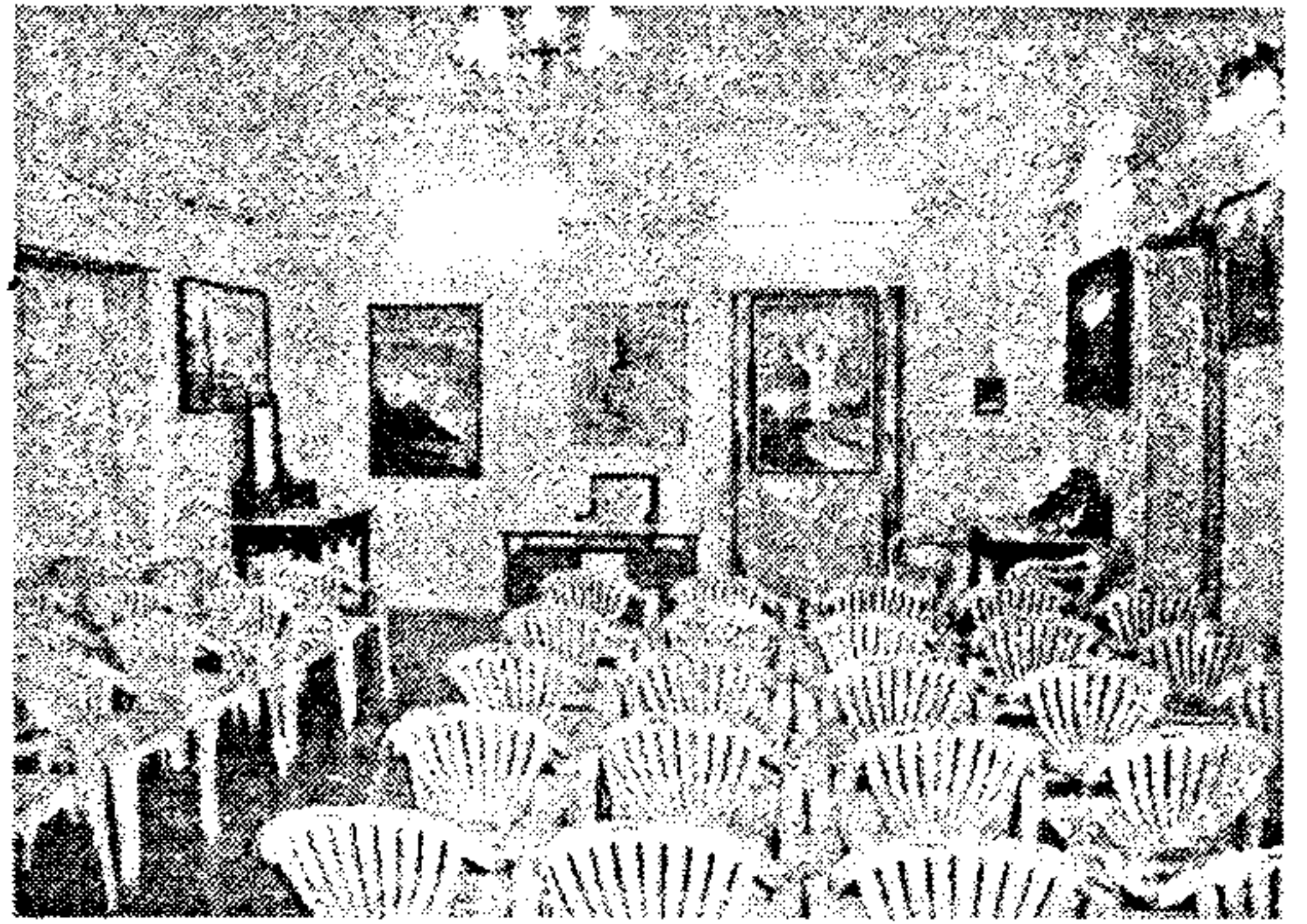
As we enter the Centenary Year of the Ramakrishna Mission (1897-1997), we are happy to announce that a Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Memorial has come into being at Porbandar, Gujarat.

It is now a part of history that as a wandering monk, Swami Vivekananda travelled extensively all over Gujarat on the western shore of India during 1891–1892. During these wanderings he stayed for a period of nearly four months in the Bhojeshwar Bungalow at Porbandar as a guest of the then Dewan of Porbandar, Pandit Shankar Pandurang, who was the administrator of the State during the minority of the Prince. Although he was a guest of the Prince for a few days, it is in this Bhojeshwar Bungalow that Swamiji preferred to stay. During this period he studied Panini and learnt French when Pandit Shankar Pandurang requested him to do so as he thought that a study of French would help the Swami in his future work. The Dewan, himself a Vedic scholar, was struck with the Swami's scholarship. As he came to appreciate better the breadth and originality of the Swami, Pandit Shankar Pandurang suggested to the Swami that he could surely throw a great light upon Western culture by preaching the Sanatana Dharma. In all probability, it is here that Swamiji learnt about the Parliament of Religions to be held the following year (1893) and prepared himself for his future role as the prophet of the new civilization. The Bungalow sanctified by Swamiji's stay has been attracting visitors and devotees from all over the world.

On 12 January 1997, the birthday of Swami Vivekananda which is observed as the National Youth Day in India, the Chief Minister of Gujarat, Shri Shankarsinh Waghela, formally handed over the nearly 150 year old historic Bungalow, built on 847 sq. metre area, free of cost to Revered Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, in order to start a **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Memorial**. The inauguration ceremony, attended by 3000 students, 500 local dignitaries and three State ministers, was addressed by Shri Shankarsinh Waghela, Swami At-



*The Bhojeshwar Bungalow
from the Eastern Side*



*Vivekananda Memorial Hall
on the Ground Floor*

masthananda and Swami Jitatmananda. The Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot, steered the entire project to start this Mission Centre at Porbandar.

The Mission, at the moment, is running a Vivekananda Memorial Hall for regular weekly lectures and for displaying through paintings and photographs the life and message of the Swami. The Hall on the ground floor is being utilized as a Shrine for regular prayer and meditation by the public. Other humanitarian activities like a full-fledged Library-cum-free Reading room, a bigger auditorium for students' and teachers' retreats and seminars, etc., and a dispensary will be taken up when the necessary land promised by the Government of Gujarat is made available to the Mission authorities. □

Reviews and Notices

SWAMI VIJNANANANDA (*A Disciple of Sri Ramakrishna*) LIFE AND TEACHINGS: *tran. Devavrata Basu Ray, Bengali Original by Swami Vishwas-
rayananda; publ. Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras 600 004; 1980; pp. 75; Rs. 12/-.*

This slender book is about the life, vision, sayings and teachings of Swami Vijnananandaji, the last disciple of Sri Ramakrishna to join the monastic brotherhood and the fourth President of the Ramakrishna Order.

The book comprises of four parts: (1) Life; (2) Spiritual visions of the Swami; (3) His sayings, particularly his reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda; and (4) His teachings.

Reading on his life, spiritual visions and his reminiscences of the great Trio, one gets a glimpse into Swami Vijnanananda's depth of character, his quiet inner strength, his remarkable spiritual insight and transcen-

dental visions, profound scholarship, complete faith in Sri Ramakrishna and his readiness to serve his Master's cause with utmost sincerity and faith. The beautiful temple of Sri Ramakrishna at the Belur Math speaks of his professional skill as an engineer, as it was constructed under his close supervision.

In the last part of the book the Swami's valuable teachings on mind and self-control, truth and faith, japa and meditation, desire and renunciation, work and service to the country, holy life and on other miscellaneous subjects are neatly given. They impart spiritual succour and valuable counsels to spiritual aspirants and devotees.

The English translation is very well done. It is a very valuable publication, because the example of a great and pure individual is the best help that can lead us to noble thoughts and deeds.

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Junagadh*

Ramakrishna Mission: Swamiji's Vision and Fulfilment

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languages.

Another major field of service activity, with which the name of Ramakrishna Mission is most frequently associated, is the large-scale relief and rehabilitation work organized by it for the victims of flood, cyclone, earthquake and other natural and man-made calamities.

The efficient and selfless way all these service activities are being carried out has earned for the Mission the good will of millions of people, the confidence of the nation and the trust of the government. Nevertheless, impressive as these achievements are, they are still quite small in comparison with the vastness of the population of India and

the dire needs of the suffering people. Indeed, the need for different forms of service is so great in a developing country like India that no single voluntary organization can hope to meet anything but a small fraction of that need. In the present social context in India the real importance of the Ramakrishna Mission lies in the pioneering role it has played and in the example it has set for other voluntary agencies to undertake similar service activities. In the words of Swami Vivekananda, 'We are to put the chemicals together, the crystallization will be done by nature according to her laws.'¹⁶ □

16. CW, vol. 5, p. 29.

HUMAN EXCELLENCE

THE WAY TO GOD

The early name of the second Sikh Guru Angad Dev was Lahina. While on a pilgrimage, he met Guru Nanak, the first Sikh Guru, and being charmed by his wisdom and holiness, decided to stay on with him.

One day Guru Nanak asked his eldest son Shrichand, 'What is it that you desire?' Shrichand answered, 'I do not want anything other than devotion to God.'

Thereafter Guru Nanak asked his younger son Lakshmichand the same question to which the young man replied, 'I desire wealth and property.' On hearing this, Guru Nanak gave Lakshmichand a large sum of money and blessed Shrichand saying, 'May you be established in renunciation.'

Lahina was also standing nearby, and Guru Nanak turning to him asked him also to disclose his desire to which Lahina replied in all humility, 'O Lord, I desire neither the vision of God, nor do I want riches and prosperity. If only I can get an opportunity to serve the Guru and those that serve the Guru, I shall consider myself blessed.'

Deeply moved on hearing this reply, Guru Nanak told Lahina, 'My Son, God's grace is given him who wishes to serve God's creatures. You are the rightful successor to the Guru's seat as you have understood the path of service.'